

Journal of Development Policy Review (JDPR)

Vol. 1, Issues 1 and 2

January – March / April – June 2020

**Special Issue:
The COVID-19 Pandemic and India**

Editors:

Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury

Balwant Singh Mehta

Simi Mehta

Soumyadip Chattopadhyay

By

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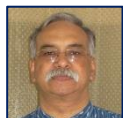
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Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury is Senior Fellow with Observer Research Foundation's (ORF) Neighbourhood Initiative and Secretary (Honorary) at the Indian Association for Asian and Pacific Studies (IAAPS). She specialises in South Asia, energy politics, forced migration and women in conflict zones. She was the recipient of the Public Service Broadcasting Trust Senior Media Fellowship (2007) and the Kodikara Award from the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS), Colombo in 1998-99. Anasua was ICSSR Post-Doctoral Fellow (2004-06) at the Centre for the Studies of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi. She was also Visiting Fellow at The Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, where she worked on the subject "Logistics of Regional Integration in Europe and Question of Sovereignty." She is editor of the online journal — *IAAPS Perspective*.

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Simi Mehta, PhD (Managing Editor)

Simi Mehta is the CEO and Editorial Director of Impact and Policy Research Institute (IMPRI) and Managing Editor of JDPR. She holds a PhD in American Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and was a Fulbright Fellow at Ohio State University, USA. Her areas of research include US and India's agriculture and foreign policies, international security studies, sustainable development, climate change, gender justice, urban environment and food security.



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Foreword

It gives me immense pleasure to write the Foreword of the "Special Issue on the COVID19 Pandemic and India" of the Journal of Development Policy Review (JDPR) by Impact and Policy Research Institute (IMPRI). I am delighted to learn that the first issue is dedicated to generating an informed discourse on how the global pandemic has impacted the various facets of human life through their interactions in the society, economy, polity, environment and geopolitics. These issues have been very well analyzed, argued and presented by the authors comprising of reputed academicians, budding researchers and serving & former administrative officers. The academic, scholarly and intellectual rigour presented in the very first issue of the Journal is indeed commendable.

It is a matter of privilege & personal pride for the state that the Journal of Development Policy Review is the result of determination and hard work of Impact and Policy Research Institute (IMPRI)- officially registered in Ranchi, Jharkhand and is a Government of India recognized Start-Up think-tank for evidence and action-based policy research. I am happy to know that the Journal is being launched on the successful completion of two years of IMPRI, which has emerged with a high reputation for itself as an ethical, independent and non-partisan think-tank.

I extend my heartiest congratulations to the entire team of the editorial group for their rigorous and concerted efforts. I am sure the innovativeness of the JDPR team at IMPRI would continue to tread on the path of promoting intellectually sound and informed debates for the benefit of humanity across the globe. Such analytical ability demonstrated by the team on a contemporary epidemic issue is really praiseworthy.

I sincerely wish that Journal of Development Policy Review attains a global reputation for excellence in promoting rational and unbiased scholarship and critical analysis.

Ranchi, 26th May, 2020.


(Droupadi Murmu)

विवेक देवराय

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FOREWORD

The Covid-19 pandemic has caught not just India, but the rest of the world, unawares and it is but fitting that the Special Issue of the journal should be devoted to that. Much is yet uncertain, the course the pandemic will take, and consequent policy actions by the government, both Union and State. However, this much is clear – the world, India, society, politics and economics will have an altered prism, though one should legitimately distinguish between reactions that are short-term and those more medium-term in impact. Predicting future trends is fraught with problems, but that's what ex ante research is about. Ex post analysis is often easier, but it is the ex ante that makes one think.

The papers in this Special Issue straddle a host of issues people mention – the nature of international trade and cross-border investments, with possible governance changes in international institutions; geo-political shifts; the excessively exploitative nature of human-environment relations; changes in definition of work and the work environment; better urbanization and habitat planning; decentralisation of governance; breaking down silos in labour markets (informal/formal, gender, migrants); social safety nets; the rural sector; and health concerns. Some of these issues have been traditional concerns of “reforms”. For instance, the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act is decades old, but has rarely been enforced. Reactions to Covid-19 have highlighted disparities in governance capacity across States and even districts. All that the pandemic has done is to flag these concerns and perhaps provide an additional trigger for reforming what should have been reformed years ago.

A Special Issue of a journal cannot be expected to provide answers to all the questions. Indeed, it cannot also be expected to raise all the relevant questions. However, collectively, these papers provide plenty of material to think about. Discussion and debate affects the discourse and eventually leads to change.

Bibek Debroy
(Bibek Debroy)



एक कदम स्वच्छता की ओर

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Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister
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New Delhi-110 001

26th May, 2020

Andrew Ford
Australian Consul-General Kolkata



**AUSTRALIAN CONSULATE-GENERAL
KOLKATA**

It is my great pleasure to provide a foreword to the very first issue of the Journal of Development Policy Review (JDPR) which is a special issue on the COVID19 pandemic and India. This global pandemic has stopped the world and stripped trillions of dollars from the global economy. The editors wisely decided that since so much research and action is now focused around COVID-19, a special issue focused on the implications of the global pandemic on the society, economy and geopolitics would be most appropriate.

As a diplomat, I am proud that even in these difficult times, the global community is working together to help manage the health, economic and social impacts of the pandemic. As part of these efforts, top foreign affairs officials from Australia and India have participated in regular coordination calls with other key regional partners on the response in the Indo-Pacific.

Government policies to address the pandemic need to be based on well researched evidence and data. This issue of the JDPR covers a range of topical issues such as the role of international trade, the future of work, migrant workers, the social safety net, and impacts on vulnerable members of society such as the elderly and disabled. With many people's homes also becoming their place of work in recent months, I particularly welcome the work on gender issues and roles. My hope is that the articles in the JDPR can positively influence the policy environment in India.

I congratulate Dr. Simi Mehta, Managing Editor, and her staff at the Impact and Policy Research Institute (IMPRI) on this first issue of the JDPR.

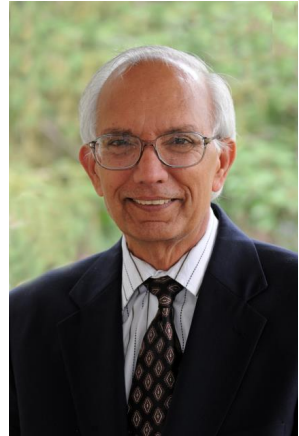
Kolkata
May 26, 2020



29th May 2020

Foreword

This Special Issue on COVID-19, with far-reaching implications on the lives of the people, is very important. It brings together important insights, policy perspectives, and special articles addressing issues affecting the elderly and disabled, women's work and health, children's health, the need for a social safety net for the socially vulnerable sections of the society, the reach of MGNREGA, city-frontiers and governance, work-from-home and lockdown culture, review of the United Nations' report on water and, finally, climate change with a focus on pandemics, international trade and geopolitics, employment scenarios, and other pertinent subjects that have been well-analyzed, argued, and presented.



I am particularly happy that the Journal has given a space for Young Voices, and the authors in this section have brought to light important topics of discussion. It is heartening that some authors in the Journal are both serving and former administrative officers, and they bring to the fore the true essence of administration, i.e., serving the people. I believe that their participation in penning down their insights is important to demonstrate to the wider audience their readiness to break the glass ceiling and perform their functions in tandem with the development policy priorities of the government for the people. I am impressed by the gravity of subjects selected for this Issue and reputed authors from the academia have done full justice to the same.

I extend my heartiest congratulations to the editors of the Journal of Development Policy Review, Prof. Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury, Prof. Balwant Singh Mehta, Prof. Soumyadip Chattopadhyay and Dr. Simi Mehta (Managing Editor, JDPR and CEO and Editorial Director, IMPRI) and the Journal Secretariat led by Dr. Arjun Kumar (Director, IMPRI) for their rigorous and concerted efforts. I am sure the innovativeness of the JDPR team at IMPRI will continue to tread on the path of promoting

intellectually sound and informed debates for the benefit of humanity across the globe. I look forward to reading all future issues of the Journal.

My hope is for the Journal of Development Policy Review (JDPR) to attain a global reputation for excellence in impartial scholarship and critical analysis. I extend my heartiest congratulations, to the authors, advisors, reviewers, editors and publisher of JDPR. Lastly, I have seen the way Impact and Policy Research Institute (IMPRI) has grown by demonstrating resilience to challenges and a determination to work hard and expand over the past two years, and so has built a reputation for itself as an ethical, independent, and non-partisan think-tank. May it accomplish greater heights in the field of evidence and action-based policy research and work towards sustainable socio-economic and environmental development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rattan Lal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rattan" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Lal".

Rattan Lal,
Distinguished University Professor of Soil Science, SENR
Director, Carbon Management and Sequestration Center

Sukhadeo Thorat (Padma Shri)

PhD, D.Litt., LL.D, D.Sc., D.S.

Professor Emeritus, Centre for the Study of Regional Development,
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(**Former Chairman** of University Grants Commission (UGC) and

Former Chairman of Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR))



I am delighted to write the Foreword of the “Special Issue on the COVID19 Pandemic and India” of the Journal of Development Policy Review (JDPR) by Impact and Policy Research Institute (IMPRI). The COVID-19 pandemic has affected countries all over the world and impacted the lives and well-being of people and crippled the economies. The pandemic induced recession is looming large and downturn could be deep and lengthy. Countries are facing enormous challenges to manage this pandemic and more so the poor countries where a large majority of workers are engaged in informal economy and are not covered by social security measures and hence susceptible to face multiple vulnerabilities. The adverse effect on migrants, rural and urban poor, infirm, persons with disabilities and disadvantaged sections of the society are most likely to be more intense and severe. Millions of people have lost jobs and are likely to face hunger and be pushed into poverty, especially the marginalized sections of society

I am particularly happy to see that the first issue is dedicated to generating an informed discourse on how this global pandemic has impacted the various facets of human life in a much wider perspective. These issues have been very well analyzed, argued, and presented by the authors comprising of reputed academicians and practitioners, serving and former administrative officers, and budding researchers. The academic, scholarly, and intellectual rigor presented in the very first issue of the Journal is indeed commendable.

I am encouraged to know that the Journal is being launched on the successful completion of two years of IMPRI, which has built a reputation for itself as an ethical, independent and non-partisan think-tank.

I extend my heartiest congratulations to Dr. Arjun Kumar (Director, IMPRI) - who was also my last PhD student at Jawaharlal Nehru University and the editors of the Journal of Development Policy Review, for their rigorous and concerted efforts. I am sure the innovativeness of the JDPR team at IMPRI would continue to tread on the path of promoting intellectually sound and informed debates for the benefit of humanity across the globe. I look forward to reading all future issues of the Journal.

I wish that Journal of Development Policy Review attains a global reputation for excellence in promoting rational and unbiased scholarship and critical analysis.

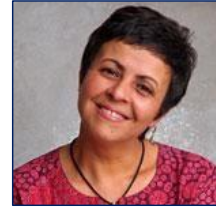
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26th May 2020

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The coronavirus pandemic has brought untold misery to the lives of people around the world. It has also worsened the situation of millions of people who have lost their jobs and are at risk of hunger and poverty.

The pandemic is putting solidarity networks to the test. I am therefore pleased to see that the Journal of Development Policy Review (JDPR) has published a special issue on COVID-19 which contains in-depth and unbiased articles and analyses of its far-reaching implications, for example, the negative effects on migrants, the urban poor, people with disabilities and disadvantaged segments of society are more likely to be more intense and severe.

Through rigorous work, JDPR covered the most important aspects of the crisis caused by the pandemic from a much broader perspective and the main aspects affecting lives and livelihoods. The special issue is most timely and certainly an important milestone in the completion of two successful years at the Impact and Policy Research Institute (IMPRI).

I extend my sincere congratulations to the authors, advisers, reviewers and editors of the JDPR. I extend my most sincere congratulations to the contributors to the Journal as well as to the editors, Professor Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury, Professor Balwant Singh Mehta, Dr Soumyadip Chattopadhyay, and Dr. Simi Mehta (Managing Editor, JDPR). I would also like to thank the journal secretariat led by Dr. Arjun Kumar (Director, IMPRI) for their rigorous and concerted efforts. I am confident that the innovative character of IMPRI's JDPR team will continue to walk the path of promoting healthy and informed intellectual debates for the benefit of humanity around the world. I look forward to reading all future issues of the Journal.

Wishing JDPR a global reputation for excellence in unbiased research and critical analysis. Finally, I congratulate and wish the IMPRI team for its determination to work hard and build a reputation as an ethical, independent and non-partisan think tank. May it reach new heights in the field of evidence-based and action research and work towards sustainable socio-economic and environmental development.

29th May 2020
Algiers

Samia Zennadi
Chairperson
Impact and Policy Research Institute (IMPRI)

Editors' Note

We are delighted to present to you Volume 1 Issues 1 and 2 of the *Journal of Development Policy Review* (JDPR). This is a Special Issue on the 'COVID-19 Pandemic and India'. It is divided into the following sections: *Insights*, *Policy Perspectives*, *Special Articles*, *Young Voices* and *Report Review*. Articles in these sections focus on the COVID-19 pandemic that has already posed and continues to pose innumerable challenges for policymakers and citizens across the globe. The pandemic has demonstrated how vulnerable are our economies, health care systems, environment and societies as well as social systems, especially when the strong bond of globalization has connected all the countries of the world. Increasing number of infected persons, fatalities, skyrocketing unemployment and access to healthcare facilities becoming inadequate, etc. have been a feature for advanced, emerging and developing and even underdeveloped economies, alike (of course in varying degrees). Though COVID-19 is a universal challenge, developing countries are disproportionately hurt.

Mitigating measures, especially the lockdown, have brought their economies to a halt and the costs in terms of destitution, hunger, and death are much higher. The pandemic has exacerbated the economic and social divides already present in these countries with women and vulnerable groups and marginalized communities being the worst sufferers. With almost over two full months into coronavirus being declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (March 11, 2020), the future still remains uncertain with heightened levels of anxieties. Government of India responded to this crisis with lockdown and announced a slew of financial packages. Almost all the state governments have responded to the challenge considering their local realities. In fact, these unprecedented times have showcased one of the best examples of cooperative federalism in India, where both the union and the state governments have worked in tandem with each other.

However, weak health infrastructure has led to inadequate testing and diagnoses and so, the true scale of spread of COVID-19 in India has been a matter of concern. Moreover, with 90% of its workforce engaged in informal sector with no job security or benefits and a significant majority of the urban citizen lacking access to basic services and housing, India is facing enormous challenges in controlling the epidemic and the likely regressive impacts on peoples' lives and livelihood.

In this light, this inaugural issue of JDPR addresses the urgent need for new evidence and research to improve our understanding of the economic and social crisis and the appropriate policy responses in developing countries with special reference to India. In particular, this issue explores what does this pandemic mean for globalization? What are the economic and social impacts of this pandemic and who is most affected? What are the new emerging future livelihood opportunities? What are the government policies to mitigate the pandemic effect in short, mid and long-term? What are the implementation challenges and how to improve the effectiveness of these measures? How citizens and communities who are most directly affected can be engaged in policy making and, thereby, facilitating better policy response?

We hope the insights given in various papers of this inaugural issue of the JDPR will greatly benefit the social science research community and policymakers for making appropriate decisions. We also hope that this Special Issue takes the step in the right direction in harmony with the broader aim of JDPR to bring together academic rigour and practical perspectives of the practitioners, scholars, policy shapers, and activists, and bridge the gap between theory and application of public policy by documenting and fostering discussions on development processes, policies and interventions of India and the world.

We are honoured to have Foreword messages for this Special and Inaugural Issue of JDPR from Her Excellency Honourable Governor of Jharkhand, Ms. Draupadi Murmu; Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM), Prof Bibek Debroy; the Consul General of the Australian Consulate in Kolkata, Mr Andrew Ford; Distinguished Professor at the Ohio State University and recipient of the World Food Prize 2020, Prof Rattan Lal; Emeritus Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Former Chairperson of University Grants Commission and of Indian Council for Social Science Research, Prof Sukhadeo Thorat; and Chairperson of Impact and Policy Research Institute (IMPRI), co-founder of APIC éditions and Founding Member of the Global University for Sustainability, Ms Samia Zennadi.

We thank the members of the Journal Advisory Board and of the Editorial Review Committee for embarking with us on this journey of promoting intellectual debates and discussions. This Journal would not have seen the light of the day without the insights and articles of the authors. The alacrity with which they have responded to our invitation and the high standards of their write-ups within a tight deadline have been an inspiration for us. We appreciate the JDPR Secretariat at the Impact and Policy Research Institute (IMPRI) for their incessant efforts and maintaining a cheer despite editorial pressures. Lastly, we thank our publishers at IndraStra Global New York for commencing on this endeavour with us to disseminate informed insights to enable informed opinion and decisions.

Welcoming feedback and comments at: jdpr.journal@gmail.com!

With Gratitude,

Editors,

Journal of Development Policy Review (JDPR)

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Trade in the Time of the COVID-19 Outbreak

Utpal Kumar De¹ and Bibhas Saha²

Background

There are several predictions about the drastic fall in international trade as the fallouts of the global negative externality of ongoing pandemic COVID-19. Still we are in the middle of the crisis and do not know the exact span and scale of it. It is thus a difficult task at this moment to ascertain the trend of trade and forecast the exact level and magnitude of impacts of this major event. The impact of COVID-19 on trade has multiple dimensions through interlinked processes. Also, there are significant uncertainties regarding not just the virus itself, but its social and economic impacts as well. The uncertainties make the task of formulating trade and related policies extremely difficult. This note only outlines some likely impacts based on the limited information presently available on some key trade related variables, anticipating some normalcy in the post-COVID-19 scenario. However, we do not know when such normalcy may return.

The coronavirus hit India in February 2020 via foreign visitors and Indian returnees from abroad. Not surprisingly, it spread from the metro cities and then through community transmission, reached small towns. After the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the virus a global pandemic in mid-March, India went into a nationwide lockdown on 24 March and all businesses and industries had to close. But the virus gradually migrated to remote areas with the returning migrant workers. But it remains an open question whether the current lockdown has reduced the infection, or it would have been better to delay the

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lockdown after managing the movements of the migrant workers. It is also unclear if the current lockdown has been utilized to upgrade the medical infrastructure to deal with the pandemic at its peak when it arrives. The economic costs seem to be huge while the fatality is significantly low. Only time will tell if the timing and the scale of the lockdown were correct.

The Impacts Observed So Far in India

Like India, many other countries also adopted lockdown in various forms following their own COVID-19 outbreaks leading to serious economic contractions. Global trade virtually came to a standstill and countries virtually coiled themselves into a shell of autarky. This shutdown of the major socio-economic activities along with restriction on movements of people led to sharp contractions in the level of output, household spending, investment and international trade and local level businesses. There are forecasts on India's GDP growth in 2020 to be very close to zero or even negative¹.

The trade is absolutely associated with the production activities, demand-supply and transportation facilities. Almost every country now has cut off the general international travel except emergency rescue operation of stranded people and transaction of ordinary goods too. Only the exchange of essential items like medical related equipment, medicines etc. have been continued. Even the trade on petroleum has come down seriously with reduction in its consumption demand. Due to lockdown, automatically the trade related production activities have been disrupted. The industries are also struggling to survive in this phase due to several socio-economic-administrative measures to control the spread of COVID-19.

The Indian economy already started displaying its dismal picture with stubborn production activities despite slow late charge in the second phase of lockdown. The index of industrial

production (IIP) already declined by 16.7% on a year-on-year basis in March 2020. Industrial production in March fell over a base of 2.7% (Press Information Bureau, 2020a). However, permission has been given to operate agricultural and allied activities with transportation to harvest the standing matured crops and not to allow it to spoil further due to vagaries of weather. Also, some essential industrial operations with limited workforce are allowed due maintaining social distances. Yet the activities continued at a very slow pace and there are examples of huge revenue losses to the farmers due to scarcity of workers and for the disrupted transport system. The market linkage for their products has been broken though some spike in price of essential farm products has been observed by the end users in many city areas. The general food inflation has increased to 10.5% in April 2020 (Press Information Bureau, 2020b).

Major industrial activities and two other sectors like construction and tourism have been completely stopped. But limited construction activities, especially the ongoing government projects have been allowed in the third phase of the lockdown after May 3, 2020. However, due to lack of supply of raw materials and sudden shortage of labour force with their migration to home villages, the scope of operation has been restricted to a very low scale. The entire tourism and hospitality sector, which was the fastest growing earlier, have now completely stopped. Given that transport, hotels, and related businesses employ large number of people, the fear of mass unemployment is now real.

Nomura and Goldman Sachs predict that the Indian economy would contract by 4% in the current financial year (during 2020-21) due to the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, i.e., growth rate to fall to -0.5% in 2020 and -0.4% in 2021 (*The Economic Times*, 2020). Earlier, Moody's Investors Service estimated the growth rate to come down to zero.

Within India trade is also in serious jeopardy owing to the loss of employment and earning, that caused impoverishment and

loss of spending capacity of the large number of working-class population. Hence, both demand and supply side shocks are clearly visible. That is why Duflo and Banerji (2020) suggested for direct government transfers to those people under social welfare schemes to keep the market alive from demand side.

World Trade Scenario under COVID-19 and After

Earlier, in its 8 April 2020 press release World Trade Organization (WTO) warned that the global merchandise trade is going to contract by 13% to 32% this year due to Covid-19 pandemic (World Trade Organization, 2020a). All regions of the world will be hit hard -- a double digit impact everywhere --, but North America and Asia will suffer most. In 2019, total trade of the world stood at about 18.89 trillion US dollars, which was already 0.1% lower in volume terms from 2018 due to the ongoing trade disputes between the US and China, and tensions within the Eurozone economies, notably between the UK and the rest. India also faced a downward trend on its exports, due to US protectionism and its own domestic economic mismanagement affecting competitiveness.

As the coronavirus has proved to be the deadliest and highly unpredictable, forecast made a month ago might just be obsolete. Nearly half a million people around the world are affected and two hundred eighty thousand dead (as of 10 May 2020), both numbers steadily rising. That means, the WTO forecast may soon have to be revised by the end of the summer, when the devastation in the US and Europe becomes clearer.

Eurozone is going to face its steepest recession in its twenty-year-old history with a 7.7% contraction in GDP (Khan and Fleming, 2020) UK will have a 14% recession as per the estimate of the Bank of England, worst in three hundred years, as the second quarter growth has plunged by 25% due to lockdown (Strauss, 2020). Add to this, the combined effect of the diversion

of funds from business investment to the health sector, and postponement of all trainings and labour productivity improving activities. US lost all the jobs that it created after the financial crisis of 2008-09 in just over two months with the unemployment count standing at 33 million and growing. There is no official forecast from the US government yet, but the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned on 14 April 2020 that there would be a 6% contraction of the US economy in 2020, worst since the Great Depression of 1930s (Rappeport and Smialek, 2020). Gita Gopinath, Chief Economist of IMF, has said that the world economy is going to *contract* by 3% reversing the expectation of a growth of 3.3% from 2019. That means, a contraction of 6.3% from the potential level. Such is the scale of devastation of just phase one of the Pandemic.

Going forward, 2021 offers a much better picture with the hope of recovery, because the current losses have been inflicted by policy induced sudden stoppages and the economies *should* spring back to life as soon as lockdowns are lifted. But there is a big difference between would and should. The global supply chain is fully broken. China seems to be ready to do business, but the rest of the world is in no position to buy from China or from anybody else. It is also abundantly clear now that while the stoppage has been sudden, lifting of lockdown is going to be ten times trickier. By the very spatial nature of contagion, not all regions of a large country -- note China, India, US, Russia, Brazil and EU in this category -- will be contemporaneously infected, and thus will not be equally ready to come out of the lockdown. People will also be reluctant to start engaging in public or to commute to work until they see credible efforts by their governments to track, contain and respond to infections, not to mention the inherent uncertainty of a vaccine coming to our rescue very soon. For developing countries, the problems are monumental.

India's Trade Prospects

Given this grim outlook of severe recessions in major Western economies, India's prospect of goods trade is in complete peril. In 2019, India exported goods worth 324 billion US dollars and imported goods worth 484 billion US dollars -- a clear deficit of \$160 billion.

However, one consoling factor for India is that services trade will not suffer in the same way. In 2019, India exported commercial services of \$214 billion, of which IT services and call centers constitute a large chunk. India was 8th in the world (in total value) and occupied 3.5% of the global share of the services export. At the same time, India also imported commercial services of \$178 billion; this left a modest surplus of \$36 billion. However, there is an apprehension of reduced IT sector jobs for Indians in USA (as said by the Trump administration often to curtail H1B visas for Indians) in the ongoing crisis. It may be possible to mitigate the loss of IT jobs in the US if Europe recovers early and reaches out to the Indian market, which is distinct possibility given the growing apathy of the West towards China in the light of the coronavirus.

In this backdrop, India is not in a good shape. An added concern is that many fear India's epidemic is still more than a month away to reach the peak (expected peak time is late June to mid-July), which means India will not be ready to resume its trade (in whatever measure readiness is possible) until October, while its major trading partners will come out of the first phase of the epidemic by June. The second phase will not hit the Northern hemisphere until November, so it seems. So, if India hopes to capture some of China's businesses, that hope may not be well placed, although in one sector India will experience positive gains, that is in pharmaceuticals. It in fact already has, but to increase the potential to capture world market requires huge investment and diversification in such products. There are several countries

including India that adopted temporary measures to stop export of selective medical items, which could have brought precious foreign exchange to India (World Trade Organization, 2020b).

Some steps have been taken towards that direction with an emphasis on small and medium scale export-oriented industries through injection of liquidity, lowering interest rate by RBI and some more relaxations. Till now, Germany, USA and Switzerland are the major exporters of medical products (about 35% of world demand) and China, Germany and the USA together supply about 40% of personal protective equipment and still there is a huge shortage in the supply of pharmaceutical products as per the WTO Report published on 3 April 2020. But some more steps need to be adopted like the reduction in medical related tariff, which is relatively high in India among trading countries, reduction in GST on pharmaceutical products, which ranges from zero to 18%. Even the Ayurvedic products being promoted at present attract 12% GST, which may be lowered at least for some time to encourage diversification towards such items.

Possible Strategy for Trade Recovery

Within India, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan are likely to be well past their own peaks, when the Eastern states like Bihar, West Bengal, Assam and Orissa see their initial surges. Thus, regional variations in the surge timing of the infection will make it difficult to have a uniform national strategy. The industries may try to respond by rotating their production around from high- to low-infection regions, and a new type of work substitution may emerge. The re-distributional consequences of such changes are unknown can be hugely upsetting to workers who are tied to their locations. Managing not just the virus and the production chains, but also the discontent of the people will be key to India's recovery.

Apart from already announced interest cut, soft loan and liquidity provisions, some more measures are demanded for recovery by various industrial groups that includes relaxation of labour laws for two-three years with enhanced working hours and preserving minimum wages, cheap power supply etc. But the former would invite scope for exploitation of worker. Also, a question remains is that even if the operations are allowed, whether the workers already returned to remote areas after taking so much trouble will get the confidence to come back and rejoin their duties very soon. The problem is more serious for the informal and small-scale sectors, who could not retain the workers and it seems to take a long time to be on the path of smooth recovery after this COVID-19 induced depression.

Further, as De (2020) wrote earlier that just opening selectively one or two sectors would not help much to revive the trade and markets because of the interlinkages and connections across sectors. With strong complementarity, these sectors work in unison and move together. The linkages also exist between regions within India, and for international trade, between different regions of the world. So, we have to wait for normalcy to return in other parts of the world, where our trading partners reside, and they are able to resume their import and export.

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ⁱThe Bank of America (BoA) has revised India's real GDP growth projection for 2020-21 downwards to 0.5% as against the earlier estimate of 1.5% as it expects the lockdown to get extended beyond May 2020.

Future of Work: The Emerging Gig Economy

Balwant Singh Mehta¹ and Arjun Kumar²

Background

Rapid technological advancement around the world has ushered in the era of ‘the future of work’ also known as ‘industry 4.0’ leading to an increase in the number of gig economy workers. However, with the paralyzing spread of COVID-19, the nature of ‘future of work’ in future cannot be comprehended. The pandemic has pushed people indoors and necessitated remote working. Heavy dependence on internet connectivity and recognition of gig work has increased manifolds, so much so that it is begun to be counted as essential services. Web-based working models like Zoom and Google Meet are being considered as the backbone on which work from home during lockdowns are being sustained. This is in tune to the gig economy where significant and permanent changes in the way work is done or supervised.

Gig economy is a labour market characterized by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs. It offers two types of task based work (i) ‘crowded work’ such as digital marketing, online tuitions, content writers, translators, graphic designers, software development, accounting, data analytics, legal work, medical transcription, tele-medicine and social work involving freelancers, which can be done from anywhere; and (ii) ‘on-demand work’ such as personal transport services offered by Uber and Ola, food delivery services provided by Zomato and Swiggy, and e-commerce services of Amazon and

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Flipkart. The rise of gig economy work is attributed to its flexible work hours and independence.

According to Payoneer's Global Economy Index, 2019 (Moldovan, 2019). India is among the top 7 destination for gig economy workers. In India, around 1.3 million people joined the gig economy in the second half of 2018-19, recorded a 30% growth in the first half of the year, while the gig economy market worth \$3.4 billion, and India is the fifth largest country for flexi-workers after US, China, Brazil and Japan (Kathuria et al., 2017). The nature and quality of jobs generated for the freelance workforce need in India to be examined so that appropriate policy suggestions can be put forward for policymakers to make informed decisions (Mehta et al., 2020).

Gig Economy and COVID-19

Amid COVID-19, the on-demand gig economy workers across the world are operating at the frontline, carrying people around and delivering essential goods at their doors. For instance, in India, online grocery stores such as Big Basket and Grofers are providing services of delivery of essential items to customers in partnership with Uber. Some innovative partnerships have developed to continue their work using gig workers such as Uber drivers in Bengaluru, working with partnerships among start-ups, traditional businesses and hospitals to deliver essential goods or transporting healthcare workers. After the end of lockdown 2.0, some e-commerce gig economy works have been resumed in select areas in India in compliance with government regulations, which will provide them required relief and boost. They are playing an enormous role in restricting the further spread of coronavirus by risking their health and safety like the other warriors such as doctors, nurses, police and others.

Gig workers are considered as 'independent contractors' or 'freelance workers' or '*partners*' and not '*employees*'. They do

not have regular wages or full-time jobs and generally have low or no social security benefits. They have little recourses or savings or other safety nets to survive. Since the gig workers are not 'employees', most of them are caught between choosing to remain at home, self-isolating to avoid potentially passing the virus onto others or remaining in 'essential' service work to support themselves and their families. Amidst this uncertainty, gig workers, some stay at home and face financial ruin while others continue working by taking their life at risk. At the same time, due to lockdowns, demand for some services offered in the gig economy have declined or become impossible to offer due to rules for social distancing.

Challenges

Governments around the world have announced insurance for health service providers and security personnel and hiked their salaries in some places, but gig workers have remained out of such considerations. They are not considered at par with other frontline workers like the police and doctors, who are working during the pandemic. Majority of them do not have access to any employment protection such as health insurance and sick leaves (De Stefano, 2016), and since they generally work hand-to-mouth, they may not have savings to fall back on.

In India, with the lockdown millions of migrant workers have moved to their hometowns and villages. Seeing this as a potential threat of losing cheap labour, some relief measures for workers have been announced. However, those working on on-demand platforms have been excluded. The government bailout schemes rarely cover them or even when they do, their conditions are too stringent for gig workers to qualify. In the US around 200,000 gig workers went on strike in the last week of March 2020 to draw attention to safety and wage concerns, who are working during the health crisis.

Future of Gig Economy

The gig economy has huge potential to create widespread impacts across the economy. The size of the gig economy is projected to grow by a 17% compounded annual growth rate and generate a gross volume of around \$455 billion by 2023 (Monga, 2020). Several estimates show that between 70 million (Woodcock, 2020) to 1.2 billion people are engaged in gig economy work globally (Lynkova, 2019). Some studies predict that the freelancers could represent 80% of the global workforce by 2030 (Petrov, 2020).

The COVID-19 crisis is redefining the ‘future of work’ with emergence of remote working, increasing automation and rise in the recognition and reliance on gig economy workers. While possessing efficiency, technological innovation, and incentives to domain experts and high skilled professionals, nonetheless, it has also exposed a fundamental lack of social protection and the precarious nature of subsistence of on-demand gig work, especially for the less-skilled and piece-workers. The Great Depression and the Second World War led to widening the health and safety nets of the vulnerable and other workers’ in the US. Similar response is expected across the globe after the COVID-19 pandemic would be over. On the other hand, ‘crowd work’ has gained momentum as many high and medium skilled jobs are being performed remotely and is providing a roadmap of the future of work.

Way Forward

To ensure that the gig workers live a life of dignity, COVID-19 comes as an opportune moment to provide them the social security benefits and including them in the employee category, so they can get the benefits of social security and other government welfare schemes as per the Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals- decent work (Goal 8 – decent work and economic growth, n.d.),

India can consider steps similar to California's Assembly Bill (AB 5) bill that recognizes gig workers as employers eligible for state and employer sponsored benefits such as insurance, overtime pay and leave (AB 5 Worker status, 2019). It would set up a fund through corporate social responsibility (CSR) that will provide health insurance, pension and other benefits to gig economy workers. It is noteworthy that the Indian government has introduced gig economy workers in the draft social security code circulated a few months ago, includes health benefits and insurance coverage.

Further, there is an urgent need to take an appropriate step by the companies for the welfare of gig workers. In India, Ola Cabs and Zomato have started funds to support their workers, by seeking donations from the public and from management, but workers are yet to see the benefits of the funds. There is little clarity as to how these funds will operate; they should come up with transparent rules and regulation to encourage public to participation in such a fund more.

The gig economy work is going to be the future of work. Therefore, there is an urgent need to provide better employment conditions, which will likely to push more young jobseekers to the participate in gig economy as a full time, not as a stop gap solution in the absence of suitable employment.

In the time of pandemic like COVID-19, most of the corona warriors such as doctors, security personnel and others have been given hikes in their salaries and been provided huge amounts of life insurance cover in case of death during the duty, but the gig economy workforce have remained neglected, as the latter are also involved in serving the people by risking their lives. The governments should consider their importance in these difficult times and provide them the necessary life insurance cover and benefits like other corona warriors (Mehta and Kumar, 2020). They must also be given free personal protection equipment such as disinfectants, gloves and masks, daily sanitization of their

vehicles and regular medical checkup facilities including that of their families.

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The City Frontier: Lockdown and Local Governance

M. Ramachandran¹

The extent to which our urban local bodies have been effective and proactive in handling the current coronavirus crisis is something that would be needed to be studied in detail once we get some relief from these stressed times. States have a view that the Centre need not lay down so minutely as to what is to be done in terms of restrictions on movement, closing border and related issues. All these have local context specific connotations and so, those living within the city or town limits are naturally left thinking about both the ways in which pandemic is influenced by statutory limits and the appropriate process of handling the pandemic.

Then the question is, have we been able to take all those measures which were necessary to arrest the spread of the virus? In many ways, the answer would be yes, because of the well-recognized governance system, from state to district and then further down to the blocks, towns and villages. But as we do not have an established elected governance system at the district level, the next available level where there is elected representation is that of the local bodies. And to be fair to our local bodies, it appears that these bodies along with the parastatals have been more or less successful in maintenance of essential services like water supply, supply of electricity and removal of garbage.

When we come to our local governance system, Mumbai experiences have raised serious policy concerns. It is well known that little more than half the city's population lives in slums,

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which happen to be the most vulnerable to this pandemic. And this is a pointer to the lack of seriousness over a period of time in addressing the problems of the slum dwellers. One was hoping that earlier with the Rajiv Aawas Yojana and with the present ambitious Housing for All mission, Mumbai could have been in the lead in finding a more or less permanent solution to the miseries of the homeless and the huge number of slum dwellers. And this exactly is the issue of local governance, which has come into focus now.

The powerful city governance system has failed to capitalize on their surplus resources combined with the central schemes to work out practical solutions like *in situ* up gradation, slum rehabilitation, finding available vacant land for new construction, having potential for improving the living conditions of this large segment of people who remain at the base of the city's economic activity. So, the question remains as to why the state government and the powerful local body could not together proactively to address the housing issue in the city particularly catering to the problems being faced by the increasing slum population? Moreover, in the post COVID-19 phase will the city undertake focused, time bound effort to bring about the required fundamental change in living conditions of one of the largest slums in the world?

Moving to a smaller city we also have the example of Gurugram, where an integrated governance structure consisting of the district administration, the city corporation, the city bus service and the Development Authority seems to have been able to deliver better. They have also been able to keep the effects of the virus spread under control and have acted in the best interests of the city residents. The municipal workers were kept motivated, good supports were elicited from the resident welfare associations, food was distributed to almost one lakh needy people every day, the idle city buses were deployed along routes to reach provisions and other essentials to various parts of the city. Further,

the integrated command and control centre set up under the Smart City Mission was put to full use to monitor the epidemic control activities. Thus, it is clear that with effective collaboration among the development authorities and all concerned departments as well as active support from the state government, the systems at the city level are able to perform and deliver.

Regarding the potential of local governance systems to respond properly to the pandemic, let us also look at the example of the National Capital Region (NCR). Unabated expansion of the territories has made it imperative to bring the adjoining regions in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan under one coordinated arrangement of functioning through a legislation. Unfortunately, a formal, single governance system could not be put in position for this region as the territorial limits of the different jurisdictions had to be respected. But supporting infrastructure was promoted in the region through expansion of Delhi Metro along with free movement of taxis, auto-rickshaws and establishment of residential living plus corporate offices.

But what is it that those residing in this extended area, having to move into the capital city and vice-versa suddenly find? In the wake of COVID-19, the residents of these extended regions encountered a different world as the borders were closed, metro trains topped plying, and there was no way regular free movement could take place between the laid down geographical limits except under specified and stringent conditions. It was for the concerned state/Union Territory (UT) governments to keep the requirement of continuous movement of these people for whom the state/UT limit was of no relevance in the normal scheme of things and work out a methodology whereby the nitty-gritties of their being part of an integrated geography could have been sustained. Somehow, we seem to be lacking working mechanisms of facilitation in scenarios like this, an essential ingredient of the NCR concept. Yes, larger interests of the larger population prompted measures of this kind, but what the ordinary people would want to know is

why there could not be standing arrangements whereby administrations on both sides could talk to one another and have workable mechanisms in position since going by the concept of the 'region', people had decided to be on one side or the other.

Generally, it appears that everything relating to fighting the pandemic is happening at the level of the Chief Executive of the city. How different it would have been if s/he had the required data base and information system from levels closer to the people. Big cities have zonal or regional offices, mostly department wise but these are offices used to either administering something or waiting for complaints and grievances. It may be recalled that years ago when the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) was under implementation, states were asked to go in for a reform to enact a community participation law to institutionalize citizen participation and provide for 'area *Sabhas*' below the level of wards in urban areas. The logic behind this move was that citizen participation is essential for making democratic process effective and for strengthening the same, thereby also providing a platform to citizens to influence policy/program development and implementation.

Going below the level of wards where there would be 'ward committees', area *Sabhas* were to be constituted at each polling booth level, meaning a governance level closer to the people which would be compact and manageable because each polling booth would have about 1000 voters only. As per the Election Commission of India figures, we have on an average 800 to 900 voters at the polling booth level. To facilitate drafting of the required legislation, a draft 'Nagar Raj Bill' was circulated by the Centre to all states. It was left to the states to decide the territorial limits of these 'areas', which could include the entire geographical territory in which all persons mentioned in the electoral roll of a single polling booth, or if the state government so decides, two or more contiguous polling booths also could constitute an 'area'. A list of eight functions covering subjects like

generating proposals for development programs, identifying eligible persons to be beneficiaries of schemes, suggesting location of street lights, community water taps, assisting the activities of public health centers in the area etc. was also suggested. These ‘*Sabhas*’ were also expected to impart awareness on matters of public interest such as cleanliness, promoting harmony and unity among various groups of people.

One can imagine the various positives of having a close involvement and engagement of people residing in a compact area like that of the polling booth level in times of a huge crisis like present one, thereby contributing to the efforts of the city administration. As handling this dangerous pandemic is teaching us, communication is important and individual action in adhering to all the laid down norms is crucial in situations like this. With the ‘area *Sabhas*’ functional, it would have been easier for the municipal authorities to communicate better with residents about the various requirements at each stage and the latter, in turn, could have given regular feedback about the ground level situation. This would have worked well particularly in areas with dense population. As we all know, people to people communication tends to be more trustworthy in a small area and in a crisis, this also helps in reassuring the people and in giving them a better sense of confidence in an almost panic situation.

In practice, at least three states namely, the then composite Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra took steps to act on this requirement proactively by providing for ward committees and area *Sabhas*. An amendment was made in the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation Act to provide for these and accordingly ward committees and area *Sabhas* were constituted. Similarly, constitution of these two levels were notified after an amendment to the Karnataka Municipal Corporation Act.

However, there was not much interest in detailing how the area *Sabhas* are to be constituted for a city like Bengaluru. Maharashtra went to the extent of amending the relevant Act to

provide for area *Sabhas* clearly stating how these are to be constituted and what their functions are. But even after some eight years of doing so, the state government was yet to notify the required rules regarding constitution of these units. Some more states are reported to have provided for these additional levels, but one has not heard of any proactive action at the area *Sabha* level in any of the states of India. In the cities of Hyderabad and Visakhapatnam, these area *Sabhas* are structured on selection basis and not on election basis.

Importantly, the provision of ward committee did not receive much resistance as the councillors are mandated to chair the meetings of these committees. For example, state like Kerala did not go down to the level of area *Sabhas* since it was considered sufficient to have the ward committees' level only. It is reported that the meetings of these committees are attended normally by sixty to seventy people. Of course, there is a point in saying that while a big city like Mumbai has wards ranging in population from five to ten lakh, whereas cities like Dehradun or Chandigarh have population at the ward level ranging from three thousand to eight thousand. Appraisal of the JNNURM found that though the Community Participation Law is in place in many states, its implementation in ensuring community participation in urban planning, development of infrastructure and service delivery is limited to just a few consultations with the community leaders. It has been found that states are encountering difficulties in operationalizing the area *Sabhas*. This reform calls for a political consensus and there is reluctance on the part of councillors to share powers with the area *Sabhas* members.

In the process of all this what we have been denied is active functioning of and contributions by two desirable levels closer to the constituents which could have made city governance smoother and better. Area *Sabhas* with details about the residents, their day to day issues and requirements could have played a constructive role in the present times when one does not even

know one's neighbour, not to speak of the locality as a whole. Today's situation management requires data about senior citizens in the area, their specific requirements if any, single persons living alone, slum dwellers, labourers working or residents in the area, domestic helps and other workers coming into the area to provide services, linkages with nearest possible provision stores, medical shops and units, easy access to water and electricity solution points and so on. Collecting and updating such information by the area level units whether elected or in the alternative, administratively created, need not be seen from a point of view of any sort of intrusion into privacy. But on the contrary, existence of such a robust arrangement could benefit city administration in accessing those key inputs. It will facilitate better decision making, especially in a crisis situation like that of today. In normal times, also it will definitely help to plan better, lead to garnering support of more hands-on problem solving especially in matters of service delivery and also help the municipal authorities to reach out to each of the area residents with more transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness.

Exodus of Migrant Workers: The Mobility Conundrum during COVID-19

P.C. Mohanan¹

Large scale exodus of migrant workers from Delhi and other metro cities following the announcement of the nationwide lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has brought the topic of migration to sudden attention in public debates. Scenes of people defying instructions for containment of population and attempting to trek long distances to reach their home stations swamped the media- first from the national capital Delhi and later from cities in industrialized states. While a complete lockdown is an untested exercise anywhere in the world, a complete disregard for migrant population in official policy making is quite baffling.

Migration for employment reasons has great economic significance for the migrant families and to the cities where they migrate. Individually, the migrants are visible everywhere in the city, but collectively, they are rarely accounted for in the city's demography. Documents on Indian domestic migration have highlighted how most of the migrants, especially those coming for employment, lack access to government welfare schemes in their respective places of migration. This lack of portability of welfare entitlements adds to the need for reverse migration in the face of economic downturns that have uncertainties over their livelihood. In the following section, we look at some key dimensions of migration in key cities with special reference to Delhi.

Dimensions of Migration – National Perspective

Census counts people at their usual residence, which is the place where they live and sleep most of the time. Migrants are those who

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report that they were staying elsewhere before coming to the place of enumeration. The National Sample Surveys (NSS) also follow a similar definition where they define the usual place of residence as the one where the respondents have stayed for six months or more or intend to do so. In this process of identifying migrants those who come and work in urban areas without making it as their place of usual residences gets omitted. Such short-term migrants can be identified only from the households from where they migrate.

The definitive data on number of migrants comes from the decennial population census. As per Census of India 2011, there were 177.6 million migrants in urban areas constituting 47% of the urban population. Of these migrants, 17.3% reported work/employment as the reason for them coming to the city. If we consider migrants who came to urban areas during the last 10 years as recent migrants, then we find that 15% of them came for work from urban areas of other states and 9.3% came from rural areas of other states.

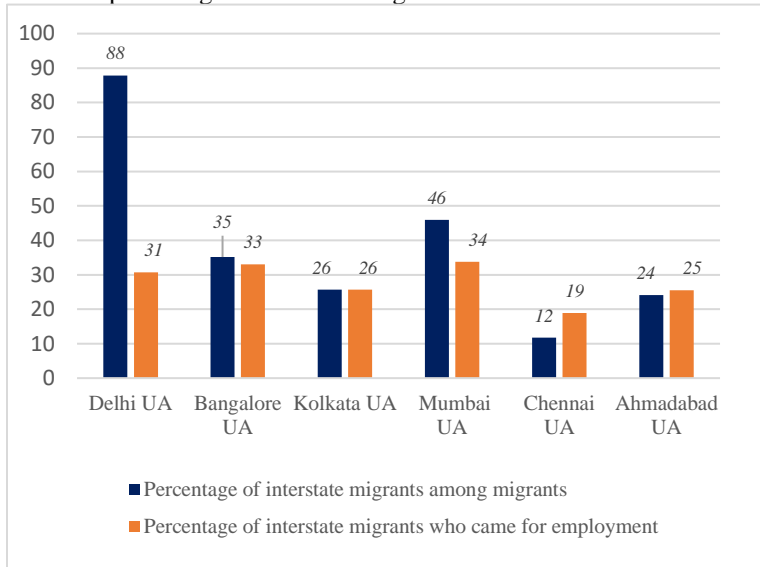
The Economic Survey 2017-18 presented as part of the national budget 2018-19 using new metrics found that the changes in same-age cohorts using the Census data yields an annual inter-state migration of about 5-6.5 million between 2001 and 2011. Besides, after analyzing railway passenger data from unreserved rail travel, the survey suggested an annual inter-state migration flow of close to 9 million since 2011. The findings of the Economic Survey from indirect data would therefore make us believe that there has been massive increase in migration in general and interstate migration in particular, in recent times. Unfortunately, we do not have recent statistical data either from NSS or any other national level surveys to gauge the recent trends in internal migration.

Economic Lockdown and Reverse Migration

All previously known disasters have been natural disasters with damages to production capacity and dislocation of supply during a short time. Under this pandemic, many countries including India have adopted the strategy of physical lockdown and the production, distribution and consumption have suffered due to complete or near complete stoppage of economic activities in the whole of the country. The full impact of the steps taken to contain the spread of COVID-19 through the ongoing economic and social lockdown is yet to be understood at this stage. But its impact on livelihood of migrants are blatantly regressive. The tenuous nature of their employment, mostly informal would have been the first to get hit due to the economic shutdown. Many firms in the Information Technology (IT), banking, financial, online commerce, etc. could introduce 'work from home' and other innovations to tide over the lockdown. However, large number of migrant workers and their families depending on the informal sector will have no such option open to them. The drying up of their income sources and their poor living arrangements would make living in the city untenable. Thus, the most affected segment of migrants in this category would be the interstate migrants.

Migration data from the 2011 Census shows that the migration pattern is not uniform across cities and towns. The six urban agglomerations (UA) of Delhi, Ahmadabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore accounted for 20% of all urban migrants. Importantly, their share of the total urban migrants who came for work was 26%. Naturally, these metro cities are expected to have a huge migrant issue in the present context. Unfortunately, the currently available city level data does not allow us to examine the socio-economic conditions or the nature of their employment or the spread of migrants within the urban agglomeration. This deficiency in migration data is the major reason for our failure to foresee the reverse migration crisis that we now face.

Figure 1: Percentage of interstate migrants among all migrants and percentage of interstate migrants who came for work



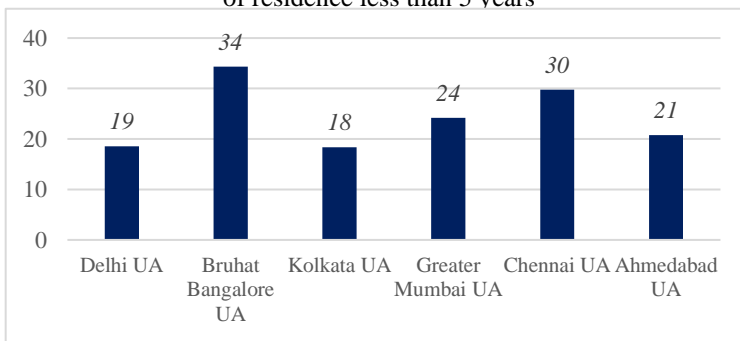
Source: Census of India, 2011

In the 2011 Census, the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi had a population of 13.9 million. Of this, nearly 51% were migrants from within India. Close to a million (14% of the Delhi NCT population) was people who migrated for employment. As Figure 1 above shows, the percentage of interstate migrants is quite significant except for Chennai. It is expected that these figures would have increased since 2011, as these cities have become centres of IT-related services and modern manufacturing.

In the case of NCT of Delhi, the Census provides district level data and we can peek at the migration scenario in some greater detail. An important point to note is that the migrants in Delhi are not evenly distributed within the city. While the New Delhi and Central districts together account for only about 3% of the migrants, majority of them are scattered in the peripheries of the city.

Another fact that came to the fore during the current reverse migration is the direction of the movement. Over half of the Delhi migrants are from the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, accounting for about 65% of the migrants who came for work to Delhi. Other states having significant migrant population were: Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand. These five states accounted for 75% of the migrants in Delhi in 2011. If we see the migrants who came for work, then these states account for 81% of them. Travel demand from migrants makes it clear that the eastern states provide the bulk of migrants to the other metros as well.

Figure 2: Percentage of migrants coming for employment with duration of residence less than 5 years



Source: Census of India, 2011

In any city, migrants with a longer duration of stay are expected to be more established in terms of housing and other welfare entitlements. Recent migrants take time to settle down. Among those for whom duration of migration was recorded in 2011, 34% of migrants who came for employment had less than 5-year duration of stay in Bangalore (See Figure 2) followed by Chennai (30%).

Where Data Fails the Migrants

We have very little data on the on the living arrangements of the migrant population and their economic or occupational engagements especially at city levels. In the case of Delhi, the geographical dispersion of recent migrants within the urban agglomeration suggests that, instead of the city center, migrants settle in the city periphery that has a lower cost of living. They largely remain invisible for the city planners. There will be very little to distinguish them from the commuting workers except for the fact that the latter by virtue of their permanent residences have access to welfare entitlements.

The Census of India 2011 does provide the aggregated numbers with limited qualitative dimensions. Migration data has fared very badly in the statistical priorities of the Government. We do not have any inter-censal surveys to project the census migration data before the next census. While the Census is held decennially, the NSS used to fill the gap with five yearly surveys on employment and migration. These have been dispensed with. The last NSS survey on internal migration and outmigration was last held in 2007-08. Importantly, many significant decisions (budgeting, staffing etc.) related to provisioning of basic urban services are based on the Census data relating to population projections. For example, the Mission statement of Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) links the decisions related to the establishment of water and sewerage lines throughout the city to the Census data.

Census data is practically incapable of accounting for the dynamic migration flows that we see today in India's metropolitan cities. A large majority of these migrants remain unrecognized, which again deprives them of access to urban basic services. It is time for a comprehensive plan to address the data issues that will help factor this part of the city's population in city planning and

in times of calamities - whether natural or COVID-19 type health crises.

The cities need to understand the living conditions of migrants in more detail. The conventional definition of households used in surveys like NSS, are likely to discriminate the migrant households who stay in camps or in temporary shelters in short spells. While nobody wants the citizens to be tracked in any intrusive manner, it is important to understand their geographical spread, housing conditions, access to welfare, sources of income, family ties, occupational pattern, etc. to be able to factor them in decision making at all levels.

Spreading the Social Safety Net: A Pressing Need during COVID-19

Rashmi Singh¹

In times of an unprecedented socio-economic and health crisis, like the one that has engulfed India and the world today, it becomes extremely valuable to draw meaningful insights from programmes around the globe that have demonstrated positive impacts in providing safety nets for the poor and vulnerable. As large portions of the country's population, especially those engaged in the informal sector, lose wages due to the outbreak of the coronavirus disease, the necessity of providing social safety nets becomes even more evident.

One of the biggest programmes in the world for Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT), *Bolsa Familia* of Brazil, has been widely recognized as an innovative instrument of social policy for redressing poverty and inequality. It was initiated in 2003 after merging four existing federal programmes, since the previous ones failed to make targeted impact due to fragmented efforts. Data systems were not interlinked, and one family could benefit from multiple interventions while another, in more abject conditions, might receive nothing. A unified cash transfer programme was therefore necessitated. A new Ministry for Social Development and Combating Hunger was created for administering it.

I had the opportunity of gaining valuable insights into the programme in my capacity as Mission Director of the Mission Convergence programme of the Government of Delhi during (2008-11), which was exploring good practices for improving the

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efficacy of various social welfare-oriented schemes meant for the poor and vulnerable.

The initial learnings were based on my visit to Brasilia in 2008 in response to the invitation for a seminar-cum-awards programme organized by the Government of Brazil for knowledge exchange and recognizing innovative practices at local levels. The second visit was facilitated by the World Bank as a study tour in which a number of senior officers from the Delhi Government, representing the departments of Social Welfare, Food and Supplies, Labour, Information Technology and Revenue, were nominated through the Mission Convergence initiative.

There is a lot of similarity in the goals between that of Mission Convergence and *Bolsa Familia*, primarily those related to poverty reduction, reduction of inequality and to bring improvement in the living conditions of the vulnerable groups, and a focus economic emancipation of women. There are many policy lessons which Mission Convergence gained from this program, such as consolidation of the central database of the poor and vulnerable, allowing it to be used for complementary programs, development of protocol manuals detailing the different operational aspects of the Mission. Performance-linked contracts were formalized between different stakeholders and incentivizing programs were also started- for instance an award program where all the Gender Resource Centre (GRC) NGOs were asked to submit nominations for awards in different categories, such as Self Help Groups, livelihood, health, awareness, other innovative strategies used for community mobilization through them.

An integration of schemes was done to some measure for schemes related with allowances for the specially-abled, and an integrated cash transfer was started in lieu of Public Distribution System (PDS) in the name of *Ann Shree Yojana* using the database of *Samajik Suvidha Sangam* (SSS). The money was transferred in the accounts of women head of the household. The following

sections provide an insight into the design of the *Bolsa Familia* program and describe its significance and the impact.

Significance: *Bolsa Familia* gained wide acceptance from the federal government, states and municipalities in Brazil as a coordinated strategy for social protection. It resulted in integration of multiple CCTs at the federal and sub-national level. Beneficiary families were also linked with complementary services, resulting in comprehensive interventions for social assistance and support services for labour.

The targeting accuracy of the programmes is demonstrated by the coverage and its rapid expansion. It started from 3.8 million families in 2003 as drawn from pre-reform programmes and reached 11.1 million families (46 million people) in 2006, i.e. a quarter of the population of Brazil and 13 million by 2010. Near universal coverage of the poor was attained. Direct cash transfer brought efficiency gains with extremely low transaction costs. Only 0.4% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was the programme cost, with 97.4% being actual transfers to beneficiaries.

Programme Design: At the core of *Bolsa Familia* is direct cash transfer to a family so that a minimum level of sustainability is guaranteed to poor households. A fixed amount was provided as unconditional transfer. A variable amount based on income levels and the number of children was transferred as CCT having a maximum cap and subject to compliances like school enrolment and attendance, immunization, growth monitoring visits, pre- and anti-natal visits of pregnant and lactating mothers and participation of families in counselling programmes. Vulnerable groups were also linked with services like capacity-enhancement for livelihood, microfinance and job placement.

The key programme instrument was a single registry, ‘*Cadastro Unico*’, a nationwide central database of poor families.

The income level for entry to the Registry was higher than *Bolsa Familia* eligibility. The poverty line recognized for the programme was half the minimum wages. Families identified in extreme poverty level were eligible for a higher transfer amount. Cash was credited monthly preferentially to the female head of the household through an electronic benefit card managed by Caixa, the Federal Bank of Brazil.

Municipalities play a key role in programme design as they identify families that are to be enrolled in the registry, select the priority group for intervention, monitor compliances and link them with complementary social services in addition to the *Bolsa Familia* cash transfer, which by itself was a very basic level of income support. Formal agreements were signed by the federal government with the municipal bodies. A decentralized management index was instituted to measure the quality of implementation in various municipalities.

Impact: The programme resulted in rapid reduction of poverty and inequality. Between 2004 and 2014, more than 28.6 million Brazilians escaped poverty with 58% of decline in extreme poverty resulting from this programme. A decline in inequality during this decade witnessed the Gini Index of household incomes falling from 0.57 to 0.52. Targeting accuracy is evidenced from 73% of benefits going to the poorest 20% and 94% to the poorest 40% of the population. A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study reported over 80% of benefits going to poor families.

The programme also resulted in higher food consumption and dietary diversification. Beneficiary families engaged with public health systems in a more informed manner, leading to better utilization of preventive healthcare services, especially for children, higher school attendance, lower dropout rates and reduction in child labour.

These conditions served as positive reinforcement for social behaviour which was also in the interest of the families in consideration. It contributed to improving psycho-social health, including a reduction in suicide rates. Conditionalities built into the programme resulted in increased enrolment of children. An improvement in women's decision-making status and increased access to the financial system has been reported, too. A stronger federal-local government collaboration was another interesting outcome, enabling a direct relationship between citizens and the federal government. Fiscal incentives were useful in strengthening such a collaboration.

Social Safety Net and India

Even though *Bolsa Familia* itself has seen highs and lows due to changes in macro-economic conditions and political commitments, insights from its operations can inform social policies that seek to address challenges like deprivation, hunger and loss of jobs. Besides *Bolsa Familia*, CCT programmes in general have demonstrated positive results in improving the lives of people in poverty.

As has been the results of the *Bolsa Familia*, the Mission Convergence has proved to be best practice in expanding the social safety net in the NCT of Delhi. The latter has brought good results in terms of facilitating documentation, reducing corruption, improving PDS and increasing access to the financial assistance schemes like monthly pensions for widows, elderly, handicapped, etc. This single window approach for information and facilitation of services is found to have informed policy learning such as poverty criteria and methodology of identification of poor at the national level. The scheme has also helped in reaching the most marginalized communities such as sex workers. Various models adopted by the various state governments and central government such as '*Mahila Shakti*

Kendra, Village Convergence and Facilitation Service (VCFS), *Poorna Shakti Kendras* (PSKs) and State Resource Centre for Women (SRCW) shows that Mission Convergence is scalable across states and different levels of governance.

Such cash transfer programmes help the poor and augment national growth by pumping more money into the economy and enabling the purchasing power of the people. Linking transfers to certain desirable social behaviours fosters development of a social contract between the government and citizens. This is useful for improving development indicators in the long-term.

At the same time, it has been recognized that for such cash transfer programmes to make a substantive difference in the lives of people, a simultaneous investment in education, health and infrastructure is crucial. India already has the foundations of a robust service delivery mechanism in place with government interventions to provide universal identification and bank accounts, namely through Aadhaar and Jan Dhan accounts. The country is well-placed to create a seamless family income programme through convergence of existing schemes like construction worker welfare schemes, maternity benefits, scholarships, pensions, the Public Distribution System (PDS) and other social welfare programmes.

As we face complex economic challenges resulting from COVID-19, innovative and tested measures can be very effective in providing relief to those devoid of vital resources to tide over the crisis. It is imperative that migrants, daily wage labourers, construction workers, landless labourers in rural areas and other vulnerable groups are provided immediate relief. In the prevailing pandemic, the central and state governments are transferring relief packages through various welfare schemes such as conditional cash transfers under various schemes – for families who are below poverty line, for women under the Jan Dhan Yojana and for registered construction workers. There have also been advance

credits of pensions for widows and old-age pensions, subsidies under the *Ujjwala* scheme for gas cylinders and many more (Kulkarni, 2020). According to the Ministry of Finance, Government of India about 430 million transactions worth a total of Rs. 161,010 million were transferred via Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AePS) during the lockdown. Over 80 million women Jan Dhan account holders withdrew funds from their accounts till May 5, 2020 (Palepu, 2020).

The Rapid Community Response to COVID-19 (RCRC) coalition conducted a rapid assessment survey among 10,992 women Jan Dhan account holders in 50 districts of eight states (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Rajasthan), nearly 90% of them had an active Jan Dhan account. Of those who had active Jan Dhan accounts, 66% had received the cash transfer of Rs. 500 in their accounts. About 76% of the beneficiaries who had received the cash transfer said that they have already withdrawn the amount. This is a big success, where the poorest people are able to access some relief amount of the government welfare scheme directly. However, there are some cases where a lot of people reporting difficulties both at the level of documentation and technical. These glitches in CCT should be rectified as soon as possible to provide direct benefits to the maximum number of poor people.

To conclude, there is no time to lose in expanding the social safety net across the country and proven efficiencies of Mission Convergence can be leveraged taking into consideration the ground realities. This will go a long way towards providing much-needed relief to needy families during the prevailing health and economic crisis presented by COVID-19.

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Rural Futures, the State and Markets

Amrita Saha¹ and Marco Carreras²

The full impact of the coronavirus is unknown and difficult to predict, but its consequences for rural economies is becoming increasingly imminent. Both supply and demand for commodities and services are affected by disruptions in global trade and supply chains and likely to have knock-on effects for farmers and rural businesses. This article focuses on these risks for rural economies, with a focus on India. Understanding how this population will be affected will be key to ascertain the support needed to protect these vulnerable groups, ensuring they are sufficiently prepared.

COVID-19 and Rural Economies

As COVID-19 unfolds, the disruptions are affecting global food production and creating strong food security risks in many countries. Various nodes in food supply chains that involve a complex network of interactions involving farmers, labourers, input providers, processing plants, retailers and more, are at risk. In fact, the United Nations World Food Programme estimated that about 265 million people could face acute food insecurity by the end of 2020 (Anthem, 2020). For Indian agriculture, employing nearly 55% of the population, forecasts appear to have been mixed. Initially, predictions suggested that the country's farm sector was functioning smoothly (*The Economic Times*, 2020), even with the lockdown measures. But the reality has been different, with severe disruptions on account of non-availability of migrant labour and transportation problems for supply chains (Dev, 2020). Furthermore, the lockdown has led to delays in procurement of crops from farmers, as harvesting and post-

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harvesting is affected (Latif and Niazi, 2020) As a result, smallholder farmer livelihoods are at risk. These events are similar to past crisis that have shown how restrictions of movement curb farmers' access to markets, reducing the availability of labour and resulting in unsold stock, food losses, and income losses (United Nations, 2020).

While short-term effects are already evident, for the medium to long-term a more severe reduction in food demand is expected (Pandav et al., 2020). Rural areas will be directly affected, as facing excess numbers, households will have to cope with reduced food availability. The evidence is starting to emerge, as a recent study shows that over 50% of households in rural India are cutting down on food items after the lockdown (Pandit, 2020).

Additionally, measures restricting mobility have a direct effect on informal-sector workers, as their daily livelihoods are affected (Terp et al., 2020). With no liquidity, these actors face great hardships in food affordability. Food prices are also expected to rise, while there is a fear of an overall price deflation in the non-agricultural sector, and this will exacerbate the situation (*Deccan Herald*, 2020). Furthermore, health and sanitary concerns could devastate poor rural communities already facing challenges such as weak resilience, poor nutrition and limited access to resources (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), n.d.). There is also emerging evidence about stigma and misinformation about the virus (Biswas, 2020). Spread of fake news linking the spread of the virus to chickens cost the Indian poultry market billions (Khandekar, 2020).

The economic uncertainty from COVID-19 calls for a combination of short-term policies to safeguard livelihoods as well as medium to longer-term measures towards building resilience. Governments have announced health and safety measures, social protection programmes to safeguard lives and livelihoods. The private sector is also stepping in as many big multinational corporations and corporates are aiding the

government and public-private partnerships are investing in health facilities and preparedness plans (Pothan et al., n.d.). Globally, agriculture ministers from the G20, African Union, ASEAN countries and Latin American and Caribbean have agreed on keeping global food markets open and refraining from imposing new trade barriers (The World Bank, 2020).

In India, the state has announced relief packages for farmers, in addition to promising financing to strengthen infrastructure, building better logistics and major reforms (Jebaraj, 2020). Important areas for intervention are as follows:

- *Expand social security programs:* Relief in the form of temporary cash handouts and grants for poor farmers are essential. There is a clear demand for furthering this immediate support. For example, the PM Garib Kalyan Yojana that provides additional free food grain to those families with ration cards can be expanded, to avoid risking that the poorest and most marginalized families are left out (Narayan, 2020).
- *Ensure coverage of loan waivers:* Ensuring coverage of loan waivers will be important to ensure access for the vulnerable. Recent waivers of three months on farm loans have not reached the smallest and most marginalized farmers (Padhee, 2020). To expand coverage, universal cash grants and community kitchens must be considered for a more comprehensive relief package.
- *Additional support for women farmers and entrepreneurs:* Women in the rural economy bear a double burden, doing farm work and meeting childcare and caring responsibilities, likely to worsen with additional COVID-19 caring roles (Chopra et al., 2020). Targeted support for women will be necessary to safeguard their livelihoods.
- *Digital modes of delivery:* Digital tools and technologies should be facilitated for addressing some of the disruptions on the supply side – with new models for contracting labour,

accessing machinery, and soliciting services. Preliminary evidence of changes in the relationship between farmers and consumers is evident in Maharashtra, where decentralized markets and door-to-door delivery systems are allowing farmers to have direct access to consumers (Biswas, 2020).

- *Invest in capacity building and structural policies:* Efforts that prioritize and invest in training and building capabilities for the use of new technologies for farmers can go a long way in building resilience (Pandav et al., 2020). Structural policies like discussions to promote a Central Law, allowing farmers to sell directly to customers and not only to licensed traders, and removing inter-state barriers to commerce farm products can bring in medium to long-term transformation (Damodaran, 2020).

Conclusion

A combination of measures that are coordinated to withstand the current period of hardship will be needed to protect the rural economy - prioritizing safety nets for vulnerable populations, protecting women and the marginalized; along with longer-term strengthening of commitments towards investing in resilience to ensure stronger rural futures, with collaborative support from states as well as markets.

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Leadership During Pandemics: The Real Test

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Introduction

The new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is the recent pandemic that has threatened human life. It is an infectious disease caused by the coronavirus through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020a). People infected with the COVID-19 virus experience mild to moderate respiratory illness. Currently, there are no specific vaccines or treatments for COVID-19 (WHO, 2020a).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 started in Wuhan, China on December 12, 2019. The WHO declared it a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. COVID-19 has been fast spreading in the world thereby infecting people and causing fatalities. WHO (2020b) reported that by 20 May 2020 the world had almost 5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including over 300,000 deaths. The confirmed cases include over 2 million cases reported in the Americas; 1.9 million cases in Europe; approximately 400,000 cases in Eastern Mediterranean; 170,000 cases in Western Pacific; 150,000 cases in South-East Asia, and 66,000 cases in Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic is also negatively impacting on local and national economies.

The speed and scope of the coronavirus poses extraordinary challenges for leaders in national, state, and local governments (Kerrissey and Edmondson, 2020). Whereas important responsibilities of these leaders during pandemic crisis

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include solving the immediate problem and keeping it from happening again (Gates, 2020), available evidence shows that most leaders face the ‘leadership test’ as far as their roles in devising effective responses to COVID-19 pandemic are concerned.

Some ‘coronavirus leadership tests’ that government leaders face includes stopping or slowing the spread of the COVID-19 virus in their jurisdictions, saving lives of their people, as well as saving their failing local or national economies. Indeed, government leaders must make complex choices during this COVID-19 pandemic which “involve a trade-off between potential benefits (e.g., saving more lives and avoiding a collapse of health care services) and costs (e.g., economic costs)” (Donnarumma and Pezzulo, 2020: 1).

When making such hard choices, government leaders ought to draw on shared ethical values. National Ethics Advisory Committee of New Zealand (2007) argued that society members are likely to appreciate and support leaders who base their hard choices on shared ethical values and make decisions with goodwill and reasonable judgement. Likewise, Upshur, Faith, Gibson, Thompson, Tracy and Wilson (2005) reported that the use of ethical values to guide decision-making in the pandemic crisis is likely to enhance trust and solidarity within and between organizations and communities, and strengthen the legitimacy of plans and levels of trust in those who may need to make difficult decisions for the common good.

The social, economic and political contexts and the shared ethical values might have necessitated government leaders’ choice of diverse policy interventions to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, some government leaders have devised and implemented the full lockdown of their cities, states and nations; others have implemented the partial lockdown strategy, and, yet, some others have resorted to the ‘no lockdown’ strategy. Nevertheless, most analysts of the COVID-19 response measures

of governments have commended the adoption of the full or partial lockdown, on one hand, and blamed the adoption and implementation of the no lockdown strategy, on the other.

I believe a consideration of specific social, economic and political contexts as well as the shared ethical values when appraising government leaders' reasoning about complex choice options to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, would lead to a fair verdict of their chosen interventions and, in turn, would offer good lessons on practising ethical and effective leadership during pandemics. In fact, we can conduct ethical appraisals to determine the extent to which the shared ethical values guided decisions and actions of government leaders and whether those leaders treated their people in an ethical manner, when responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I attempt to do so in this article. I take the case of the COVID-19 response measures of the government of Tanzania and aim to ethically appraise President John Magufuli's reasoning about and eventual implementation of the no lockdown strategy.

Emergence and Measures to Contain COVID-19 in Tanzania

Tanzania confirmed its first COVID-19 patient on 16 March 2020. Following this confirmed case, the government embarked on several preventive measures to contain the speedy spread of COVID-19 in the country. The government closed schools, colleges and universities; banned sports, music events, political meetings and community events; introduced quarantines and special COVID-19 hospitals (*Daily News*, 2020a). Meanwhile, citizens were advised to practice better hygiene, physical distancing, face masking, and avoid unnecessary travels and movements. Most citizens complied with these recommendations.

Since the first case of the outbreak of COVID-19, the government has taken enormous efforts to contain the virus, except the adoption of the lockdown approach. In fact, on several

occasions of his televised speeches, President Magufuli has ruled out a lockdown approach claiming that it does not suit the Tanzanian context (*Daily News*, 2020a). Instead, the President has urged people to stop panicking, observe preventive and protective guidelines on the virus, and participate in national building activities (*Daily News*, 2020b).

Citizens' observance of prescribed COVID-19 preventive and protective guidelines and other government advised measures have together contributed to slowing down the spread of the virus in the country. As of 20 May 2020, Tanzania had recorded 501 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 21 deaths. These records stand quite a far from the 112,000 deaths from COVID-19 that were projected by the Imperial College London (Wills, 2020). Following recent evidence of the slowing down of COVID-19 spreading in the country, the government has ordered the re-opening of universities, colleges and high schools as well as the resumption of some sports as of 1 June 2020.

Ethical Basis for Tanzania's No Lockdown Strategy

President Magufuli advanced several arguments to support his choice of the no lockdown strategy and its implementation in Tanzania. In this article, I present and analyze his three arguments on (i) preventing potential harms on citizens and the national economy, (ii) obligation to neighbouring landlocked countries, and (iii) uncertainty about the lockdown timeframe. The President emphatically advanced these three arguments in a televised speech that he delivered at Chato in Geita on 17 May 2020.

President Magufuli claimed that implementation of the lockdown would have caused more severe problems to majority Tanzanians. He noted that lockdown measures would have prevented majority Tanzanians who work in the informal economy sector from earning daily income to sustain their livelihoods. Furthermore, the President argued that locking people

inside would have forced the government to feed them and that would have been very difficult given the economic incapacity of his government. Considering the social and economic situation of the country, the President was right in his belief that locking people in would have only caused starvation and unbearable despair.

In addition, the President noted that COVID-19 was hitting the Tanzanian economy hard. Therefore, implementing stringent social isolation measures in the name of lockdown would have caused severe damage on the struggling economy and contributed to depriving citizens work opportunities to earn income and sustain their livelihoods. He noted that lockdown measures would have derailed the ongoing flagship development projects which have the potential to revive and stimulate the national economy.

The above argument of preventing the potential harms shows President Magufuli's awareness of the consequences of both the adoption of the lockdown and the no lockdown strategies as well as his commitment to prevent severe harms to his citizens and the national economy. The argument also reveals the President's awareness of the economic incapacity of his government to guarantee welfare of his citizens in lockdown. Committed to preventing potential severe harms from happening and to promoting welfare of his citizens, the President had to choose the COVID-19 response with potential minimal harms. The no lockdown strategy coupled with citizens' strict observance of the COVID-19 preventive and protective guidelines was chosen because it seemed destined to achieving minimal harms.

It seems that the citizens supported the President's no lockdown strategy because they have continued to participate in socio-economic and productive activities while adhering to COVID-19 preventive measures. Given that the country has recorded few COVID-related deaths than previously projected, it

can be said that the no lockdown approach has been effective in preventing more harms.

On the other hand, President Magufuli argued that practising the no lockdown strategy in the country was important and offered his nation and its people the opportunity to fulfil their obligation toward their neighbouring and landlocked countries. He stated that his nation has the obligation to care for and promote the welfare of neighbouring countries during this COVID-19 pandemic instead of letting them suffer. In that regard, for instance, he explained:

We are surrounded by many countries, almost eight countries need us to move their economies, closing borders would mean shrinking their economies ... some countries depend on food from Tanzania, rice, maize, meat and milk...they get all these from us, so closing our borders would have severe (socio-economic) impacts (Quoted in the Daily News, 2020b).

The shared values of caring for and showing solidarity with neighbours are at the core of President Magufuli's obligation to neighbouring countries argument. These values are also important elements of the communitarian ethics of the Bantu people and have for a long time been the bases for Tanzania's corporation with neighbouring countries.

Drawing on insights enshrined in the values to care for and support neighbours during difficult times, the President argued that the time of the COVID-19 pandemic is the difficult time for neighbouring countries and Tanzania is obliged to be there for them and do what she can to help them overcome their difficulties. Given this position, Tanzania's boarders with her neighbouring countries have remained open to provide citizens of those countries with opportunities to trade or transit goods. Besides, there is no evidence indicating that Tanzanians have been unhappy with the decision to open borders for neighbouring

countries in the fear of being infected with the COVID-19 virus. On the contrary, there have been reports on citizens applauding the President for leaving borders with neighbouring countries wide open and for allowing them to participate in cross-border trades to earn livings.

President Magufuli's third argument in support of the adoption and implementation of the no lockdown strategy in Tanzania revolves around uncertainty of timeframe for practising the lockdown. The President noted that since there are no vaccines or cure for the COVID-19 disease and not knowing when current efforts to find them will bear fruits, it is difficult to determine the lockdown timeframe as the virus may last for unknown time. Given this uncertainty, the President thought it wise to learn to live with COVID-19 just as we have learnt, for instance, to live with HIV/AIDS. Accordingly, he thought practising the no lockdown is an option to that end. In fact, the President claimed that the no lockdown option provided citizens with the opportunities to continue living their lives and doing their socio-economic activities while taking all necessary precautions to prevent the further spread of COVID-19 in the country.

I agree that uncertainty about the lockdown timeframe makes it hard to determine the costs and benefits of implementation of the lockdown strategy within a reasonable time. Considering that Tanzania is economically incapable of providing for the basic needs of her citizens in lockdown, I believe opting for the no lockdown made much sense to counteract potential risks and further harms to citizens and the national economy.

Concluding Remarks

My purpose has been to reflect on the 'real test' that leaders face during the pandemics and highlight important implications for leadership practices. I have reflected on measures taken to respond

to the COVID-19 pandemic in Tanzania and established that pandemics challenge the capacities of leaders to devise ethical and effective measures to stop or slow the spread of the pandemic and to save lives and the economy. I have also established that pandemics challenge the ethics and value system of leaders and societies because pandemics require that leaders engage in complex choices and making hard decisions about people's lives and the local or national economy. Following on this important observation, I believe that the 'real test' of leaders during pandemics involves the identification and choosing of the most relevant and effective sets of shared ethical values to guide them in planning for and responding to pandemics. It follows that leaders who draw inspiration and guidance from the 'right' shared ethical values and principles are likely to consider interests, dignity and rights of their citizens while devising and implementing the responses to the pandemics. Therefore, leaders ought to develop ethical competencies and practice ethical and effective leadership to prepare themselves to pass the 'real tests' associated with pandemics.

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Challenges of Livelihood and Employment for Rural Poor and Return Migrants in Uttar Pradesh

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Amid lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) has witnessed a large flow of migrant workers. Many of the migrant workers are walking on foot to reach their native places after the lockdown has been announced since they are left with botched up livelihood, less money in pockets and no food. This is both emotional and economic phenomenon. The state has highest population in India and most of the poor people live in the state. Hence, a large number of poor emigrate to other relatively developed or industrialized states such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi and Karnataka for better livelihood opportunities. Majority of these migrants at the destination places are engaged in low paid informal and casual daily jobs without any social security benefits. These workers are most likely to lose their jobs or livelihood in any adverse conditions like the ongoing COVID-19 lockdown. As a result, millions of migrants are returning to their homes in UP after losing their jobs or livelihood at the destination places.

State Government Initiatives

To reduce this fear, and anxiety and vacillating livelihood, the government of India introduced a relief package of Rs. 1.7 lakh crore to help the poor and vulnerable population. Accordingly, the wage under MGNREGA has been increased to Rs. 202 per day against Rs. 180 earlier. This scheme has targeted to benefit

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approximately 13.62 crore families. In the economic relief package, 8 crore migrant workers are promised to provide free food. In addition, the urban migrant workers are also assured to provide affordable rented accommodation through public-private partnership programmes.

To complement the efforts of central Government, Chief Minister (CM) Yogi Adityanath of Uttar Pradesh (UP) has released Rs. 611 crore directly in the bank accounts of 27.5 lakh MGNREGA workers. Besides the above, the State has provided Rs. 1000 to over 32 lakh construction workers, vendors, kulis, rikshaw puller and destitute families, and an amount of Rs. 320 crores has been disbursed to them. The State has also provide free ration to about 1 crore families for last two months and millions of food packets to the needy. The state is now responsible for the livelihood of those who have returned to their native places in addition to the existing ones. According to MIS database of MGNREGA 2019-20, 1.71 crore workers are registered under MGNREGA in the state of UP and it is expected that 25-30 lakh of migrant workers have returned to the state. The workers can use *Jan Sunwai* Portal where a migrant can register for returning to his/her home. The state government has decided to create 25 lakh jobs in rural area to provide gainful employment to immigrant unemployed workers.

The CM has made it very clear that all steps should be taken to provide direct and indirect employment to migrant using schemes like MGNREGA, MSME, ODOP (one district one product) and schemes of other departments. An action plan is under preparation to tackle this situation by a team led by Agriculture Production Commissioner. The MSME can provide jobs to nearly 1 crore people and MGNREGA can accommodate 50 lakh workers every day. The idea of creation of 1 crore jobs in MSMEs is based on the assumption that each of 90 lakh units registered with the government can provide job to one person.

However, the MSMEs are hard hit by the current lockdown, which are likely to resume its work shortly as government has provided a huge relief package for their revival and growth.

If the migrant worker is willing to work under MGNREGA he is being issued a job card immediately. So far 6.5 lakh new job cards have been made in the current year. State is focusing on providing 100 days' job to poorer sections of population in the villages like Mushhar, Kol, Sahariya, Vantangia, Tharu, widows, and poor migrants.

Irrigation and water conservation work are being given priority under MGNREGA. In Bundelkhand and Vindhya region works like community irrigation ponds, check dams and farm ponds, rain harvesting, and ground water conservation works, silt cleaning in ponds and canals and tree plantation are given priority. Works for creation of permanent assets will be taken under MGNREGA. The norms of social distancing are to be maintained while undertaking the work. Thus, the work sites are provided with enough supplies of precautionary measures such as masks and hand sanitizers to ensure their safety.

Way Forward

To effectively increase the employment under MGNREGA, the design and implementation of the scheme is to be altered. The Districts will have to open up big projects which has potential of employment generation, and also to keep one or more works ongoing in every Gram Panchayat. The attempt should be to have one ongoing work in every revenue village and finally in every hamlet. The work on individual beneficiary's field of eligible categories can provide such work opportunities. The difficulty of providing job under MGNREGA in Gram Panchayats will increase in rainy season. As the major projects under MGNREGA are related to water harvesting, deepening of ponds, and chak

roads, this will not be possible with start of rains and agricultural operations. It is important to think of projects other than plantation works which can continue in rainy season. This pandemic has led to steep rise in demand of work and worker's turnout at MGNREGA work sites. This calls for use of the provisions of Section 2 (g) of the Act-2005 which defines - "implementing agency" includes any department of the Central Government or a State' Government, a Zila Parishad, Panchayat at intermediate level, Gram Panchayat or any local authority or Government undertaking or non-governmental organization authorized by the Central Government or the State Government- to undertake the implementation of any work taken up under a Scheme. The agencies other than Gram Panchayats should also be brought in to provide more job avenues.

More schemes should be introduced in each village to promote the individual works to maintain the social distancing. Less schemes and more crowded worksites will violate the precautionary measure to be undertaken while working in the COVID environment. The work sites should not be loaded, and a minimum permissible limit of people should be ensured on the sites.

It is important to empower the delivery systems in the MGNREGA. The availability of engineers and supervisors are required on work sites to implement the work on the sites. Apart from this, Civil Society Organizations can be engaged in awareness programmes among the rural people and can help in capacity building.

The Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are also creating job opportunities in the rural regions of the state. The SHGs running in rural areas of the state have so far sold a total of three million masks. All the departments of the government like mandi, food department are buying masks made from the SHG of Rural Development for their employees. Apart from this, the Rural

Development Department is planning to create employment opportunities for people coming from outside by training them in new sectors like batteries recharge and repair, solar lights, and mobile repairing etc.

With the uncertainty posited by COVID-19 pandemic around the world including India, the rural areas of UP are ready to shoulder the responsibilities of maintaining appropriate hygiene, sanitization, social distancing, and creating enough job opportunities.

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Challenges of Livelihood and Employment for Rural Poor and Return Migrants in Uttar Pradesh

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Maternal and Child Health Services amid COVID-19 and Lockdown Distresses

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Introduction

Human health is a prerequisite for the economic health of any country. Unless the population is healthy, the economy of any nation cannot perform. This hypothesis has been validated by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), due to which the world has been hit by pandemic and daunting economic recession. In this light, the mother and child health (MCH) cannot be underrated as pregnant women, infants and small children are more susceptible to infections and many other causes of illness than others.

Maternal health is related to care of women's health at the time of pregnancy, pre-natal, intra-partum, childbirth, and the post-partum period. Literature is replete with evidence that shows the entire phase of motherhood to be socially, economically and psychologically vulnerable. Understandably, this article argues not just for strengthening maternal healthcare but also the need to improve the various aspects of living conditions that promote health and hygiene. For instance, while the institutional deliveries have increased in the country, as evidenced by various National Family Health Surveys (NFHS)- from 39% in 2005-06 to 79% in 2015-16 to 94.3% in 2018-19ⁱ, the prevailing pandemic and the ensuing lockdown has posed several legitimate concerns and

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challenges for expectant mothers and parents having children up to the age of 5 years. The basis of all this is the closure of doctors' clinics, outpatient departments (OPDs) of hospitals and the Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) providing various types of health care advice to the patients.

Given this background, this article seeks to fathom the extent of the reach of current MCH services in India, the ways in which the pandemic has affected such services and the possible way forward in ensuring and assuring healthcare benefits to mothers, children of the age group 0-5 years in India amid COVID-19 and prevailing lockdown fallouts.

Insights on MCH in India: Evidencing Official Statistics

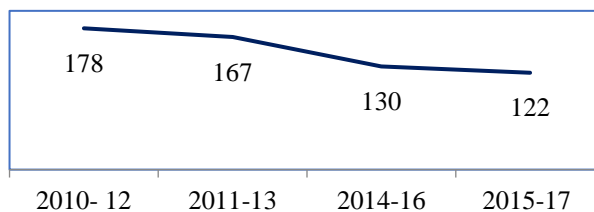
A study on The Incidence of Abortion and Unintended Pregnancy in India, 2015 (Guttmacher Institute, 2017) estimated an annual 48.1 million (4.81 crore) pregnancies with 15.6 million abortions in India, in 2015. Women of reproductive age (15- 49 years) constitute 56% (36.8 crore) of the total female (65.4 crore, which is 48.7% of total population of 134.3 crore) and 27% of total population of the country. In rural areas, it is 67% and in urban areas, it is 33% of the total female population. Children of 0-5 years comprise 10% (12.6 crore) of the total population, with 71% in rural areas and 29% in urban areas. Therefore, in totality, the purview of MCH consists of at least 37% or around 50 crore of the total population.

Important indicators of MCH are the status of maternal and infant/child mortality rate. At present, India remains far from achieving desired outcome, but has had major progress in reducing maternal and infant/child mortality and improving the health of these constituents of its population. In fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) lauded India's effort in reduction of maternal mortality, infant mortality, neo-natal and post-natal mortality, which are on track towards the achievement of

Sustainable Development Goal-5. This is evident from the following statistics:

Maternal Mortality Rate (per one hundred thousand live births):
The MMR has declined steadily from 178 per one hundred thousand live births in 2010-12 to 122 per one hundred thousand live births in 2015-17 (Figure 1).

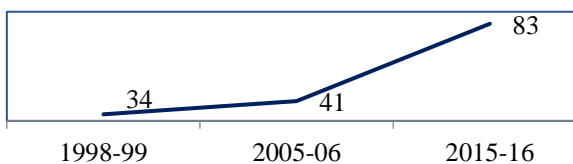
Figure 1: Maternal Mortality Rates in India



Source: Sample Registration System, Registrar General of India.

One of the main reasons for the decline in MMR is the rise in institutional deliveries in public facilities, which has almost gone up two and half time, from 33% in 1998-99 to 83% in 2015-16. With the inclusion of private health facilities, institutional deliveries stand at 79% (Figure 2).

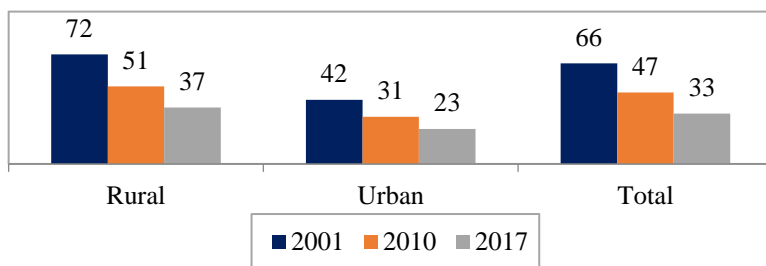
Figure 2: Institutional Deliveries in India



Source: National Family and Health Surveys

Infant Mortality Rate (per one thousand live births): The infant mortality rate has declined by almost half from 66 per 1000 live births in 2001 to 33 per 1000 live births in 2017 (Figure 3). Over the years, the gap in under-five mortality rates between urban and rural areas has reduced between 2001 and 2017, but remains significant.

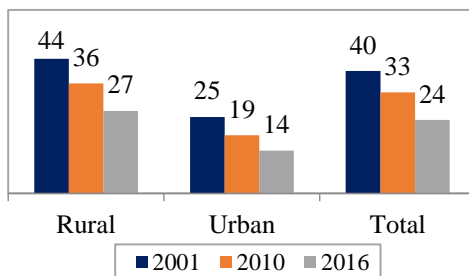
Figure 3: Infant Mortality Rates



Source: Sample Registration System, Registrar General of India.

Neo-Natal Mortality Rate (per one thousand live births): The neo-natal mortality rate has reduced from 40 per 1000 live births in 2001 to 24 per 1000 live births in 2017 (Figure 4). But there is a significant difference between rural and urban areas, i.e. 27 and 14 per 1000 live births in 2016.

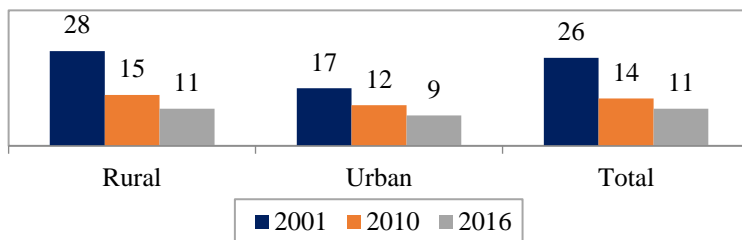
Figure 4: Neo-Natal Mortality Rates



Source: Sample Registration System, Registrar General of India

Post-Natal Mortality Rate (per one thousand live births): Similarly, the post-natal mortality rate has also declined more than half from 26 per 1000 live births in 2001 to 11 per 1000 live births in 2016 (Figure 5). Over the years, the gap in neo-natal mortality rates between urban and rural areas has reduced from 11 points to just 2 points during the 15-year period.

Figure 5: Post-Natal Mortality Rates



Source: Sample Registration System, Registrar General of India

Other MCH Indicators:

According to the maternal health guidelines of Government of India, every pregnant woman must mandatorily avail 3 or more antenatal care visits along with 30 Iron/Folic Acid tablets a month for six months (180 tablets in total), 360 tablets of calcium and 2 or more Tetanus toxoid (TT) injections. The latest National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16) gives important insights on MCH.

Maternity care such as mothers who had antenatal check-up in the first trimester (59%), mothers who had at least 4 antenatal care visits (51%). Mothers who consumed iron folic acid for 100 days or more when they were pregnant (30%), and mothers who received postnatal care from a doctor/nurse/lady health visitor (LHV)/ ancillary nurse midwife (ANM)/midwife/other health personal with 2 days of delivery (63%) has gone up almost twice in last one decade.

In addition, the delivery care like institutional birth (79%) including institutional births at public facility (52%) and home delivery conducted by skilled health personal out of total deliveries (4.3%) has also increased manifold during the last one and half decade period. In the case of children aged 12-23 months, over 62% were fully immunized (BCG, measles, and 3 doses of polio and DPT) in 2015-16. These figures indicating increasing access to mothers to public health care facilities and health personnel over the years.

Government Role in Providing MCH Services

MCH services include the needs during the process of childbearing as well as routine new-born care, the antenatal screening, nutrition for mother and psycho-social support. India has institutionalized an impressive infrastructure for delivering MCH services through a network of sub-centres, primary health centres (PHC), community health centres (CHC), district hospitals, state medical college hospitals, and other hospitals in the public and private sectors. The maternal health programme is a home-based programme implemented by Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM) and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) with forward linkages with PHC, CHC and District hospitals (DH) if it's a high risk or complicated pregnancy. In rural India, ASHAs work closely with AWWs, frontline workers (FLWs) from the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)ⁱⁱ. These are linked with HMIS (National Rural Health Mission), a digital initiative, and the progress are reported and monitored in real time. ASHAs and AWWs organize monthly health, sanitation, and nutrition days of the communities with institutional support from ANMs from the nearest health centres.

A *Cochrane Review* demonstrated that community-based interventional care packagesⁱⁱⁱ, delivered by a range of

community-based workers are effective in significantly reducing maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality.

The Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) (NHP) was launched in 2005 to reduce maternal and infant mortality by promoting institutional delivery among pregnant women. Under the JSY, eligible BPL/SC/ST^{iv} pregnant women are entitled to cash assistance irrespective of the age of mother and number of children for giving birth in a government or accredited private health facility. The scheme also provides performance-based incentives to ASHA workers for promoting institutional delivery among pregnant women. The Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK) (NHP) was launched in 2011 with the objective to eliminate out of pocket (OOP) expenses for both pregnant women and sick infants (till one year after birth) accessing public health institution for treatment.

Mission *Indradhanush* launched in 2014, aims to ultimately achieve full immunization coverage for pregnant women and children (National Health Portal, 2016). During the various phases of Mission *Indradhanush* including Gram Swaraj Abhiyan and Extended Gram Swaraj, and two rounds of Intensified Mission *Indradhanush* 2.0, a total of 3.61 crore children and 91.45 lakh pregnant women have been vaccinated (Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD), 2020).

Government of India also launched the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) (WCD) in 2017. It is a direct beneficiary transfer scheme for maternity benefit for providing cash incentive in three instalments according to various stages of pregnancy and completion of vaccinations for the new-born. Under PMMVY, 1.2 crore beneficiaries have received benefits (WCD, 2020) amounting to Rs. 4938 crore in 2019-20, although 1.37 crore applicants are registered under the same scheme. Comparatively, maternity benefits amounting to Rs. 2598 crore were released to approximately 70.6 lakh beneficiaries in 2018-19.

Launched in 2018, the Prime Minister’s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition (NITI Aayog, 2018) or the POSHAN Abhiyaan (WCD) or National Nutrition Mission focuses on improving nutritional outcomes for children, adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers in a time-bound manner during its three years. While it does not have a provision for providing nutritious food, the Take-Home Rations (THR) scheme under ICDS’ Supplementary Nutrition Program (SNP) targets exactly this. However, according to a survey (*The Hindu*, 2019) conducted by the NITI Aayog in 27 aspirational districts of the country, only 46% pregnant and lactating women received THR, despite an enrolment rate of 78%. The SNP had 71.8 lakh pregnant and lactating women as beneficiaries for 2018-19, and as on 30.09.2019 (WCD, 2019-20) had 8 crore total (pregnant and lactating women + children between the ages of 6 months and 6 years) beneficiaries of which roughly 1.5 crore were pregnant and lactating women (Table 1).

Table 1: Financial Outlays of Selected Schemes (Rs. crore)

Scheme	2019-20	2020-21
PMMVY	2300	2500
POSHAN Abhiyaan	3400	3700
Anganwadi Services	19834	20532
Umbrella ICDS	24955	28557

Source: <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/>

A program like JSSK was introduced in 2019 called the SUMAN scheme or Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) (NHP), under which pregnant women, mothers up to 6

months after delivery, and all sick new-borns will be able to avail free healthcare benefits.

At present, these myriad schemes are reaching out to around 25% - 33% of the estimated pregnant mothers. As more and more individuals emerge in need due to the fall-back in livelihood stemming from the nationwide lockdown, it is necessary to take these schemes further by increasing the scope of coverage. At least two-thirds of the target population of pregnant women should be reached out to in a structured and timely manner, with the focus shifting from peripheral Aadhaar linkages to concrete action. The budget allocation for schemes pertaining to MCH should be re-prioritized and adequately increased - ideally doubled - for this proposed increase in coverage for the current year.

A centrally funded "COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package" (Press Information Bureau, 2020) worth 15,000 crores was approved on April 9, 2020. It will be implemented in three phases - from January 2020 to June 2020, from July 2020 to March 2021 and from April 2021 to March 2024. This fund will be divided among all states and union territories. Keeping the gravity of the challenges faced specifically in the provision of MCH in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic, this package should focus on incorporating accessible infrastructure for safe deliveries.

While the government initiatives are commendable and have gone a long way in reducing the MMR and IMR and the efforts are also appreciated by WHO, yet the Sustainable Development Goal 3 of reducing the MMR to less than 70 per 100,000 live births and to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and infant mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births seems a distant goal. In fact, the Jaccha Baccha Survey (JABS) conducted across 6 states of India in 2019 demonstrated that less than half of pregnant women in rural India eat nutritious food and majority are deprived of quality

healthcare (Sharma, 2019). While the reasons for these can be deliberated separately, what becomes important is the enormity of issues that can and have already begun to overlap because of the outbreak of COVID-19.

COVID-19 and MCH Services: The Way Forward

Due to nationwide lockdown currently in force, necessary providers of MCH services like the AWCs have been confronted with a lot of difficulties. Pregnant and lactating mothers and children in both rural and urban areas have faced several challenges. For instance, the government order to the AWWs to home-deliver the dry ration for children and mothers may have problems in execution. At places AWWs have complained about the distance to be travelled, villagers threatening and, in some cases, even beating the women AWWs for coming out of their homes violating lockdown. Another challenge that has emerged is inability of the ANMs and ASHA workers to come to the rescue of pregnant mothers and infants for their vaccination as well as to arrange transportation to the nearest health facility for delivery.

While it is not known what the future will be once the lockdown comes to an end, some of the immediate steps to be undertaken are discussed below:

- a) ICT may be leveraged to harness the advantage of mobile phone and internet penetration to the remotest area of the country. For instance, geo-tagging of the beneficiary and provision of tele-medicines, using location data, call data, and HMIS database. In this situation, the health practitioner will only receive cases needing advice due to high-risk pregnancy like ante-partum hemorrhage (APH), gestational hypertension (PIH/GH), eclampsia and severe anemia.
- b) To distinguish between severe and normal cases, the programme may be administered by machine learning and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

- c) All recent beneficiaries of JSY and PMMVY having been assigned Unique IDs should be used for direct benefit transfers (DBT), provision of nutritional assessment, screening of COVID-19, delayed appointments until self-isolation, triage referrals and referral to secondary care hospitals.
- d) As an emergency measure, pregnant women (especially migrant workers) travelling or in transit on at the time of COVID-19 and seeking institutional delivery can be imparted with the benefits of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana (PM-JAY) or Ayushman Bharat (AB) with the participation of private sector.
- e) Creation of a MCH dashboard in line with Ayushman Bharat and PMMVY Dashboard to synchronize the data, harnessing HMIS and ICDS database and show the facility close to pregnant mother for the rapid welfare delivery and integration of immunization services for the home-based new born care so that all the essential immunization can be given to the children below 2 years of age without any delays.
- f) The dashboard can also track the whereabouts of pregnant women (of the region/ district/ city/ state in focus) and put mobile phones reminders on their and the cell phones of their family members, which would provide regular information on the precautions they need to maintain and the ways to respond if they catch flu-like symptoms, etc. These can be integrated with the existing applications of the government and must be triaged after primary screening.
- g) This advice may be hard to follow in pregnancy; most women have monthly to weekly interactions with the health system during pregnancy for prenatal check-ups but in the times of the pandemic this may go missing, so it is imperative to keep them informed via digital medium. For instance, the *Kilkari* application of the Haryana Government can be scaled up to include video messages for women, specific to their stage of

- pregnancy. Frequent live conversations with the doctors/health practitioners needs to be arranged to reduce the anxieties and negative psychological impacts due to the spread of COVID-19 and lockdown in effect.
- h) WhatsApp accounts must be set up where pregnant and lactating women are able to share their concerns and through audio and video messages, and volunteers can be roped with support of civil society and community networks.
 - i) Coordinators of Self-Help Groups in the villages must be identified who would assist the ASHA workers and ANMs in-home delivery of required medicines. While this would help in reducing the burden on the latter two, it would also help expand community cohesion. For this, the SHGs can be awarded certificates of appreciation that would add to the merit of a strengthening the credit scores for availing any further loans from the banks.
 - j) An urgent separate database for tracing and surveillance on the recently travelled and migrated pregnant women must be prepared and each of them must be frequently contacted to ensure if they have been infected with the coronavirus.
 - k) The government has identified both private and public hospitals that are ready for coronavirus infected patients in each district. The contact numbers of these hospitals need to be publicized through every available medium, so that the people use these when they or their family members develop COVID-19 symptoms.
 - l) Pregnant women who become infected should be treated with WHO-recommended supportive therapies (WHO, 2020) in consultation with their obstetrician/ gynecologist. These therapies must be informed to the pregnant women and the health practitioners without any further delay.
 - m) It is also important to record all new cases of pregnancies among all segments (coronial baby boomers) due to COVID-19 lockdown, so that government prepares for impending

- coronial generation after 10 months, and have a ready benchmark for future shutdowns based on the lessons learnt. The existing HMIS and ICDS database, howsoever not very reliable, yet can be low hanging fruit in this regard to utilize the Digital India architecture.
- n) Expanding health insurance coverage to women and children will increase their access to necessary health services more than other groups. Along with the maternal and child health programs, this must be added with the existing public health and community services such as prenatal care and well-childcare, and enabling services such as case management, transportation, and home visiting.
 - o) The maternal healthcare services must include mental health care, contraceptive services and supplies; diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases; prenatal, intrapartum, and postpartum care; regular breast and pelvic exams (including Pap tests), in accordance with well-recognized periodicity schedules; risk assessment; and adequate education and counselling to support these interventions. Participants also outlined children's health care needs, which vary at different ages. For the children up to 0-5 years, emphasis must be on preventive services, such as immunizations, and the monitoring of physical and psychosocial growth and development, with attention to critical periods in which appropriate care is essential for sound development and progress.
 - p) A separate, more comprehensive midwifery training programme with service level benchmarking in India must be introduced on an urgent basis. Having well-trained and capable midwives would provide a better birthing experience for the mother and would reduce the burden on obstetricians.
 - q) Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) should be roped in for better outcomes in ensuring the provision of THR. There should also be certain modifications and expansion in the type

of food provided, varying regionally, to meet nutritional requirements. Planning of resources is a must to avoid misallocation and panic.

Blueprint for an Alternative Makeshift Hospital Arrangement for Safe Delivery and Safe Abortion in each District/Block/City

While shutting down of doctors' clinics, OPDs of hospitals and the AWCs have raised enormous difficulties, this seems to be the only way forward to avoid pregnant women, new-born and infants from succumbing to the coronavirus disease. It is also true that while termination of pregnancy is an option in the initial weeks to ensure that mother and the fetus do not catch the disease, but for those mothers in advanced and high-risk stages of pregnancies, the COVID-19 challenge is severe. Added to this is the stigma attached to abortion and not all couples would prefer this. It could add to the physiological complications for women hindering further conceptions.

According to the HMIS, India has 705 districts (NRHM), which translates into an average of over 2000 deliveries per month (and lesser than 1000 abortions), per district. Lately, new-borns are being delivered in unsafe settings as was the case in a Mumbai hospital (*Scroll.in* 2020) where a woman and her three-day old child tested positive for COVID-19 after being given a room previously occupied by a COVID-19 patient. In Rajasthan (*The Wire*, 2020), a doctor denied treatment to a pregnant Muslim woman—and her new-born died.

With the coronavirus crisis expected to continue and peak in the next few months, it is imperative to urgently design and implement alternate solutions which ensure institutional deliveries, facilitate treatment to the pregnant mothers and their new-born children and address MCH in a timely and structured

manner, simultaneously adhering to social distancing and isolation. Some of these are discussed below:

Formation of Task Force/ Coordination Committee: Recently, in a video conference, the Union Cabinet Secretary advised district collectors to devise district-level containment plans for COVID-19. As part of this plan, we recommend providing adequate alternative spaces (preferably centralized within a district or block) for the delivery of babies, since hospitals are already choked and unsafe in such a time due to the inherent risk of infection. Every district is equipped with a circuit house or any such similar institutional buildings (university grounds, schools, governments stadiums, convention halls etc., currently not in use anyways), which can be used as alternative to the hospitals and medical centers affected by coronavirus. Make shift hospitals with logistics planning for physical infrastructure, machinery, equipment and tools such as masks, gloves, surgical tools and beds can be quickly developed with the support of local governments, private sectors, governments consultants, civil society, etc.; for this commitment of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and multi-lateral organizations should be tried for. Post-delivery care - such as providing nutrition to the mother and child and practicing WASH hygiene - can be provided by the pregnant individual's family and/or community. Empaneled vehicles are also being used in some States to provide transport to pregnant women and children e.g. Janani express in Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, *Mamta Vahan* in Jharkhand, *Nishchay Yan Prakalpa* in West Bengal and *Khushiyo ki Sawari* in Uttarakhand. These, clubbed with civil society and CSR interventions, would cover the crucial component of transport and mobility.

This is only possible with full and unwavering support from district officials, and the joint action of local administration and the private sector. To realize this proposition, it is recommended to form a taskforce or a coordination committee in

every states (and districts) which should consist of stakeholders from every segment of maternal and child health, viz., pregnant women, and members of their family or community (representing the beneficiary population), AWWs, eminent citizens (businesses, technocrats, individuals from civil society who have demonstrated commitment to the cause), doctors, secretary of Department of Women and Child Development and other relevant persons. These members can hold deliberations through virtual meetings. Private sector and NGOs should assist the district administration in implementing such interventions. This support could be in the form of manpower, funds, or other services, depending on the capabilities of the organization.

The whole process is focused on non-cash and in-kind help from stakeholders across different facilities - building, transportation, nursing and equipment - to provide a safe environment and support for delivery and postnatal and postpartum care, with the spirit of volunteerism in this difficult time for urgent action.

Ayushman Bharat: Viable or not? It can be proposed that Ayushman Bharat Yojana can cover the insurance cost of the pregnancy while going through private hospital deliveries. However, private hospitals may not necessarily sign up for this, as their past dues are still outstanding and they have incurred huge costs in the deliveries of the women.

Information Technology (IT) intervention and Research and Development (R&D): R&D needs the intervention of IT to make significant strides towards effective MCH in this crisis. Digital India emphasizes the need to digitize service delivery. Similarly, the Smart City Mission should be complemented with the proposed IT-research enabled solutions to provide smart delivery of these services. Integrated dashboards, wherever developed, should be incorporated with other such measures to develop

Uniform Control and Command Centres for COVID-19 - which would have an MCH component, using data on locations, communication and medical history and treatment. This could draw inspiration from the ICT-based PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation) platform. The Civil Registration System faces challenges in terms of timelines, efficiency and uniformity, and is looking to introduce IT-enabled automation in its processes for drastic improvements and real-time functioning (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2019). In MCH too, it would only be prudent to turn to a well-oiled HMIS for planning now, to maintain a trajectory of positive change.

Plight of AWWs, ASHAs and ANMs: AWWs, ASHAs and ANMs are at the frontlines of tackling this crisis head-on, with an increased risk of infection (*The Hindu BusinessLine*, 2020). As of 2019, there were close to 14 lakh AWWs and 13 lakh Anganwadi Helpers (AWHs) in the country. ASHAs are roughly 9 lakh in number (Press Information Bureau, 2020). Their pending dues should be processed, and remunerations regularized on an immediate basis. They should be provided with advance payments of three to four months to facilitate their work, insurance and safety and/or direct transfers and other forms of assistance in the same way as MNREGA workers. Further, it is a ripe time to reward them with the Governments decided minimum wage and linkages social security schemes.

This will facilitate each case of pregnancy to be treated on a case-to-case basis and ‘non-COVID only’ hospitals/consultation and diagnosis centres must be ensured and these along with the AWCs must be sanitized multiple times a day. This is because the various facets of maternal health are closely associated with maternity risks e.g. sanitation, hygiene, nutrition and traditional beliefs.

Summing Up

To conclude, with the deferral of direct and indirect taxes and other such payments for the three months (which are the main sources of revenue for the government), the revenue generation has dried up and is expected to continue this year. In this scenario, it becomes further pertinent to re-prioritize and explore alternatives - requiring minimal financial intervention from the government - on an urgent basis for planned and adequate MCH services during the livelihood lockdown and pandemic. All relevant stakeholders, including responsible and committed citizens, would have to come forward to devise and fructify a solution especially for mother and childcare, whose practical considerations would include an adherence to service level benchmarking to combat coronavirus pandemic.

There have been reports of increased dilemma of transferring the virus to the new-born child from the mother and leads to an agonizing situation of separating them from the mothers and being put in isolation wards. Perhaps, it would be wise for couples to delay their pregnancy planning until the pandemic scare is over- to relieve themselves of dealing with a yet another stress of the virus in the child-bearing process.

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ⁱAs per the Health Management Information System (HMIS) portal of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoFHW), Government of India (GoI).

ⁱⁱ ICDS aims to improve health indicators of pregnant and lactating mothers and the children up to age of 6 years with 13.64 lakh operational AWCs across the country; offering primary health and nutrition services to women and children

ⁱⁱⁱ The emphasis is on involvement of family members through community support, advocacy groups; community mobilization; education strategies; provision of care through trained health workers via home visitation and; strengthened proper referrals for

sick mothers and new-born children. These intervention packages also include additional training of outreach workers (residents from community who are trained and supervised to deliver maternal and new-born care interventions to her target population) namely, lady health workers, community midwives, community/village health workers, facilitators or traditional birth attendants (TBAs) in maternal care during pregnancy, delivery and in the postpartum period; and routine new-born care.

^{iv}BPL: Below Poverty Line; SC: Scheduled Caste; ST: Scheduled Tribe

COVID-19 Pandemic and its Consequences on the Elderly and the Disabled

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Background

The recent and ongoing wave of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has traumatized the globe. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2020a) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (CDC, 2020a), older individuals and those with pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma, heart disease or diabetes, seem to be at a higher risk of becoming severely ill from COVID-19. Some studies (CDC, 2020b) have estimated (Maier et al., 2020) that those who contract COVID-19 and who are 65 years and older have a 4% mortality rate, 75 years and older have an 8% mortality rate, and 85 years and older have a 15% mortality rate; the average mortality rate being around 2%.

In his speech (*Livemint*, 2020) on 14th April 2020 that announced a second phase of nationwide lockdown– Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi urged the citizens to provide “extra care” to the elderly, especially those with chronic diseases, in tandem with “social distancing” and self-isolation. Globally, the elderly population constitute 12.3% of the total population, and their numbers are steadily rising because of falling mortality and fertility rates. The number of persons in the age group 60 years above is projected to grow by 56% from 901 million to 1.4 billion during 2015 and 2030 (United Nations, Department of Economic

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and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2015). In India, the share of the elderly population increased from 5.6% in 1961 to 8.6% in 2011, as per the Census.

Majority of the elderly (defined as 60 years or above) population in India are vulnerable to chronic and protracted diseases and therefore prone to huge healthcare expenditure, and specifically to out of pocket expenditure. The disabled and particularly mentally disabled form the most vulnerable group as they suffer from multiple deprivation. Changing structural and functional aspects of joint families and breaking of the joint family system etc., the elderly members are gradually being shifted from family to the Old Age Homes (OAHs) or assisted livings or care givers institutions. Close to 2 crore elderly people are homeless, and some are in an abject poverty, face loneliness, abandonment and suffering from psychological problems (Sanitha et al., 2019).

The elderly population in India is estimated to be around 10.4 crore (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), 2016), according to the 2011 Census. According to the National Sample Survey (NSS) 76th Round report, 'Persons with Disabilities in India' (MoSPI, 2018), the disabled population in India is estimated to be 2.6 crore. The elderly and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) are among the most vulnerable sections of the society and constitute about one-tenth of the total population of the country. Including the disabled, out of the total older population, 2.1 crore belong to the poorest households having a monthly household income of less than Rs. 2900. These segments are some of the worst-hit in terms of accessibility, availability and affordability of basic life-saving services, and are more prone to be affected by depression and anxiety. It is now evident that the coronavirus infects people especially with weak immune system, like the elderly. This calls for an increased and immediate focus on accessible and emergency healthcare, with an emphasis on the feasibilities of practicing hygiene and distancing. This is vital for

the susceptible segments of our population that require more specialized medical attention.

We have had an overdose of COVID-19 discourses from the media and it has been reiterated that it is important to take precautions and isolate these vulnerable sections of society to prevent the country from a public health catastrophe as has been manifested in the US and Russia. In this scenario, the WHO has published ‘Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak’, highlighting the greater significance of the impact of COVID-19 on the disabled population, which can be mitigated through appropriate action and protective measures by key stakeholders (WHO, 2020a). Similarly, a statement from the WHO underlined the increased risk to the elderly from COVID-19, and pushes for a collective approach to supporting and protecting older people living alone, with a special attention to be given to those who provide care for them (WHO, 2020b).

The sudden announcement of the lockdown – now extended - in the country has led to panic and socio-economic and health emergencies, wherein the PwDs and elderly are among the worst affected. According to the United Nations (UN), unless the governments and communities act, this section will continue to face problems during the COVID-19 pandemic (UN, 2020).

The Disabled and Elderly in India: State of Affairs

The ‘Elderly in India’ Report (2016) of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India, provides an insight into some characteristics of the older population based on data from the 2011 Census and the 2013 Sample Registration System (SRS) report (MoSPI, 2016). Both the share and size of the elderly population was found to be increasing over time. From 5.6% in 1961, the proportion increased to 8.6% in 2011. For males, it was marginally lower at 8.2%, while for females it was 9.0%. 71% of the elderly population was

reported to reside in rural areas and 29 % in urban areas. The most common disability among the aged persons was locomotor disability and visual disability, with around 5% of the 60+ population having a physical disability.

There are 21 types of disabilities identified under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (*Divyangjan*), 2016). These fall under the categories of locomotor disability, visual disability, hearing disability, speech and language disability, mental retardation/intellectual disability, mental illness, and other disabilities. The NSS 76th Round report based on this classification finds a prevalence of disability (percentage of PwDs in the population) of 2.2% in India, with a higher prevalence in rural areas (2.3%) than in urban areas (2.0%), and higher among males (2.4%) than among females (1.9%). According to the Report, only 28% of the total disabled people have Disability Certificates (which is about only 73 lakh out of 2.6 crore disabled people). Only 21.8% of the individuals receive government aid, 1.8% receive aid from organizations other than government and 76.4% do not receive any aid.

The policy decision of a lockdown is not sensitive to the population of the elderly and PwD in its entirety. According to the two reports, around 4% PwD live alone and 14% of the elderly population is dependent on others (caregivers) (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2016). Frequent visits to hospitals and rehabilitation centers are a requirement. The caregivers – although immensely vital - may be hesitant to provide their services in the current scenario due to the increased risk of infection. When practising a seemingly basic habit of handwashing might be contingent upon the ability to access and use a facility to do so, following other safety guidelines would be similarly conditional, for the segments of the elderly and disabled that are at risk in isolation. According to the Ministry of Health

and Family Welfare (MoHFW), about 63% of the coronavirus related deaths are in the age cohort of 60+ (*India Today*, 2020).

Lack of accessible information and its dissemination, a faulty built-in environment and negative social attitudes towards PwDs are matters of grave concern, particularly in the prevailing times of a pandemic, which put their lives and livelihood at serious risk. Persons with visual disabilities rely highly on the sense of touch (reading Braille, providing inputs on electronic devices, using canes, etc.) for mobility and work, thus increasing their risk of getting infected. Many of the quarantine centers do not have PwD/elderly friendly infrastructure like lifts or disabled-friendly toilets. This needs to be taken cognizance of and addressed swiftly, given Prime Minister Modi's emphasis on the need to take care of the elderly as part of the agenda for tackling the COVID-19 crisis.

Government Policies, Acts, and the Welfare Framework

The nodal Union Ministry responsible for senior citizens and PwDs is the Ministry for Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE). For providing more effective provisions for the elderly, the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 was initiated (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2007). Further, the National Policy for Senior Citizens, 2011 was aimed at the welfare of older persons, and underlined the value of an "age-integrated society". It laid out eight areas of intervention: income security in old age, healthcare, safety and security, housing, productive ageing, welfare, multi-generational bonding, and media. Within the MoSJE, the Senior Citizen Division addresses the requirements of the elderly.

The Integrated Programme for Senior Citizens is a significant Central Sector Scheme here. Its main objective is to improve the quality of life of senior citizens by providing basic amenities like shelter, food, medical care and entertainment

opportunities and by encouraging productive and active ageing with support for capacity building from the states/Union Territories, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Panchayati Raj Institutions and the community at large.

The Department for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (*Divyangjan*) (DEPwD) (2017-18) under the MoSJE caters to the needs of the disabled communities. It administers three Acts: The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016; The National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999, and the Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992. The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2006) was released by MoSJE in 2006. It focused on prevention of disabilities, rehabilitation measures (physical strategies, education, economic rehabilitation), women and children with disabilities, a barrier-free environment, social security and other crucial aspects.

The major schemes of the Department include: Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase/Fitting of Aids/Appliances (ADIP); Scheme for Implementation of Persons with Disabilities Act (SIPDA); Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS); Disability Rehabilitation Centres (DDRC); and various fellowships, scholarships and skill trainings for PwDs. In 2018-19, 1.8 lakh beneficiaries availed the benefits of ADIP with an actual budget estimate of Rs. 216 crores. In the financial year 2020-21 it has been allocated a fund of Rs. 230 crores. However, it will pass the litmus test only if the resources are channeled into implementation, beyond announcements.

National Social Assistance Program (NSAP) and other Government Initiatives

The National Social Assistance Program (NSAP) came into effect from 15th August 1995. It introduced assistance for the poor aimed

at ensuring a minimum national standard for social assistance in addition to the benefits that states are currently providing or might provide in the future. It has five sub-schemes as its components (NSAP, 2014): Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS), Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS), Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS), National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS) and Annapurna. Under this program, around 4 crore beneficiaries have been digitized, in all – including 3.3 crore under central schemes and around 70 lakh beneficiaries under state schemes.

Table 1: Budgetary Allocation for Selected Components of NSAP (Rs. crores)

Scheme	2019-20 RE	2020-21 BE
IGNOAPS	6259	6259
IGNDPS	247	297
IGNWPS	1938	1938

Source: IMPRI, 2020

States are also providing financial assistance for the PwD and elderly under various schemes. Table 2 and Table 3 show, respectively, the existing state government disability and old-age pension schemes and financial assistance in India.

In light of the coronavirus crisis, it was announced that the Centre will provide (*The Economic Times*, 2020a) three months of pension in advance to poor senior citizens, differently-abled and widows under the National Social Assistance Program (NSAP). Further, under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY), the Finance Minister announced (Press Information Bureau (PIB), 2020a) an ex-gratia of Rs. 1,000 over three months in two instalments for poor senior citizens, disabled communities and widows. The National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled (NPRD) and various groups and experts has expressed dismay

(*The Hindu BusinessLine*, 2020) as the ex-gratia amount is “very meagre” and “grossly inadequate”.

Central government had also issued instructions to all states and Union Territories to ensure that caregivers of PwDs were able to reach them during the lockdown (now extended) (*The Hindu*, 2020a). In March, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment issued instructions to implementing agencies for senior citizens such as Old Age Homes, Regional Resource Training Centres and Rehabilitation Centres, to provide the elderly with special medical attention and care (*The Economic Times*, 2020b). The DEPwD has issued (Press Information Bureau, 2020) “Comprehensive Disability Inclusive Guidelines”. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has also published a Health Advisory for Elderly Population of India during COVID-19 (MoHFW, 2020)

Table 2: State-wise Disability Pension/Financial Assistance

State	Scheme	Monthly Pension Amount (INR)
Centre	Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension	300-500
<i>State Government Schemes</i>		
Andhra Pradesh	YSR Pension Kanuka	3000
Arunachal Pradesh	Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme	2000
Assam	Deendayal Divyangjan Pension Achoni	1000
Bihar	Bihar State Disability Pension	300
Chhattisgarh	Social Security Pension Scheme	350
Delhi	Disability Pension	2500
Gujarat	SantSurdasYojana	600
Haryana	Disability Pension Scheme	1800
Jharkhand	Swami Vivekananda Nishakt Swalamban Protsahan Yojana	400
Karnataka	Social Security Scheme	400
Kerala	Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension	1200
Madhya Pradesh	Social Security PwD Pension Scheme	600
Maharashtra	Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Anudan Yojana	600-900
Manipur	Indira Gandhi Disability Pension Scheme	300
Meghalaya	Chief Minister's Disability Pension Scheme	500
Mizoram	State Disability Pension	250
Odisha	Madhu Babu Pension Yojana (MBPY)	500-700
Rajasthan	Social Security Pension Scheme for Disabled	250-750
Tamil Nadu	Destitute physically handicapped pension scheme	400
Telangana	Aasara pension	3016
Tripura	Pension to person with disabilities	500-700
Uttar Pradesh	Divyang Pension	500
Uttarakhand	Divyang Bharan Poshan Anudan	1000
West Bengal	Disability Pension	750

Source: IMPRI, 2020

Table 3: State-wise Old Age Pension/Financial Assistance

State	Scheme	Monthly Pension Amount (INR)
Centre	Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme	200-500
<i>State Government Schemes</i>		
Andhra Pradesh	YSR Pension Kanuka	2250
Arunachal Pradesh	Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme	1500-2000
Assam	Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme	500
Bihar	Mukhyamantri Vridhjan Pension Yojna	400
Chhattisgarh	Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme	350-650
Delhi	Old Age Pension	2000-2500
Gujarat	Vayvandana scheme	750-2000
Haryana	Old Age Samman Allowance	2000
Jharkhand	State Social Security Old Age Pension Scheme (SSSOAPS)	600
Karnataka	Monthly Pension Scheme for Older Person	400
Kerala	Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme	1200-1500
Madhya Pradesh	Social Security Pension to Senior Citizens	600
Maharashtra	Shravan Bal Seva Rajya Nivrutti Vetan Yojana	600
Manipur	Manipur Old Age Pension Scheme	200
Meghalaya	Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension	500-550
Mizoram	Old Age Pension	200-500
Odisha	Madhu Babu Pension Yojana (MBPY)	500-700
Rajasthan	Social Security Pension Scheme for Old Age	750-1000
Tamil Nadu	Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension	1000
Telangana	Aasara Pension	2016
Tripura	State Old Age Pension	500
Uttar Pradesh	Indira Gandhi Old Age Pension Scheme	300
Uttarakhand	Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension	1000
West Bengal	West Bengal Old Age Pension Scheme	750-1000

Source: IMPRI, 2020

To mitigate the effects of the lockdown, various state governments have focused on the financial assistance being given to the PwDs and pensions to the poor elderly population. For instance, the Bihar state government is providing three-month advance pension (All India Radio, 2020) through Direct Benefit Transfer to pension holders under the Divyang scheme, among others. The Delhi government has doubled the pension amount for widows, differently abled and the elderly to Rs. 5000 per month (*The Hindu*, 2020b).

Elderly, PwD and Work Participation in the Times of COVID-19

As per the latest information available from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18, almost one out of three elderly people are engaged in some economic activities for their survival (29%). While the work participation rate among poorest 40% households is slightly higher, those elderly people belong to poor households are more vulnerable. Almost three-fourths of vulnerable elderly people are working in low productive and subsistence agriculture (73%) sector followed by construction (7.4%) and hotel, trade and restaurant (6.8%). It means that almost 87% of elderly population belonging to the bottom 40% of the households in economic ladder are vulnerable and in deplorable conditions. This, therefore, necessitates the need for urgent assistance, particularly in the absence of any alternative livelihood opportunities.

Table 4: Latest Work-related Details for Elderly and Disabled (in%)

	Elderly	Disabled
Work Participation Rate	29	23
Unemployed	1	4
Self-Employed	72	60
Regular/Salaried Employees	8	15
Casual Labour	20	23
Agriculture Sector	63	48
Industry	15	20
Services	22	32

Source: PLFS, 2017-18 and NSS, 2018; computed by authors.

On the other hand, according the NSS Survey, 2018, only 23% of the adult disabled are working, and 4.2% are unemployed.

This indicates that over three-fourth (77%) of disabled are dependent upon other family members and government welfare schemes for their livelihood and survival. Out of those employed, majority are involved in low productive agriculture sector, low income self-employment and casual work. So, one can say, that even majority of the disabled are employed, they are engaged in informal or low paid activities and are likely to be heavily affected by the lockdown.

Way Forward

With mandatory distancing advised for senior citizens, they are rapidly experiencing a plethora of changes and an exacerbation of pre-existing troubles (*The Economic Times*, 2020c) - loneliness, restricted mobility, and lack of financial security, to name a few. The India Ageing Report – 2017 by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimated that by 2030 around 12.5% of the population would be 60 years and older and by 2050 one-fifth of India's population would age (UNFPA, 2017). It further highlighted the multiple vulnerabilities and underscored the status of elderly women as well, who are at further risks due to a longer life expectancy and the absence of a proper social security network. Knowing this, and witnessing the current crisis, it is only prudent to provide appropriately increased support to the vulnerable elderly and disabled population.

Alongside, the government urgently needs to set up a corpus of its resources for the PwDs to provide them with immediate relief. Any plan initiated should be equally inclusive for the women and transgenders with disabilities and old age. Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and disability rights or advocacy groups should be involved to harness their expertise and to play important roles in raising awareness and disseminating information among the PwDs in addition to

advocating for disability-inclusive responses to the COVID-19 emergency.

Coordinated efforts of all stakeholders, governments, communities and civil society organizations are extremely crucial at this juncture, with active support from the citizenry. The affirmative actions to de-contaminate the disabled communities from the perils of coronavirus can have a far-reaching implication. These suggestions have been written keeping in mind the steps to be taken immediately during the continued lockdown period.

The NSAP has a criterion of 80% and above disability to be eligible for the benefits under the scheme. According to the NSAP dashboard, there are 2.09 crore pensioners under the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) and 17.3 lakh pensioners under Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS) for 2019-20 (National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) Dashboard). During these tough times, it is advisable to relax the eligibility criteria and expand the reach, and provide more than the ‘meagre sums’ – as suggested in the measures announced under PMGKY – so individuals are, at the least, able to meet their monthly basic needs (Kumar et al., 2020). As the number of individuals in need increases due to the fallback in livelihood due to the pandemic and the lockdown, it is necessary to take these schemes further by increasing the scope of coverage and provide assistance to more number of beneficiaries. The budget allocation for pension to the poor, elderly and disabled populations has remained static or increased only marginally. Given the pandemic the 2020-21 budget for NSAP should be appropriately increased - ideally *doubled*, to match a corresponding increase in the targeted number of beneficiaries.

The access to welfare schemes for disabled and elderly should be streamlined to eliminate mental agony, physical struggle and delays in obtaining financial assistance. Red-tape and corruption should be eradicated from their roots. The government should also strengthen other financial inclusion and social

transformation schemes like “JAM-Trinity” and make it more suitable to use technology for the convenience and not the other way around. Cash assistance must be provided along with special provisions under the Public Distribution Scheme (PDS) for the PwD and elderly on an urgent basis.

Concerted efforts should be made to ensure the healthcare of the elderly and disabled population. Geriatric departments and centers need to be set up in medical colleges and district hospitals. Primary health care and medical treatment for elderly and disabled should be given priority in the existing health services. Specific schemes for social protection should also be strengthened for improving their lives.

To combat the pandemic, awareness and information dissemination are of utmost importance. Users and reporting entities of print, electronic and social media should be instructed on and sensitized about the special needs of the elderly and PwDs. Video conferencing, telemedicine and telephonic conversation can be adopted by doctors to contact their disabled patients. An online information and grievance portal should be devised, convenient for all types of disabilities, and address the challenges specific to old-age and related ailments, as well as psychological counselling services. It should be centered on accessibility and ease of use, with simple input requirements. This is imperative to minimize the need for human intervention and dependence and promote self-reliance. Information can and should be disseminated with disability and elderly-inclusive practices of publicity (using sign language, voice assistance, minimalistic interface, and others). Information should be made accessible also in the regional languages and the information should be disseminated through the coordinated efforts of the governments, NGOs and civil societies even after the lockdown is lifted.

Governments should ensure accessible study materials and lesson plans for disabled students who do not have access to the internet. Without government support, parents or caregivers

may struggle to provide the full range of services that their children may be receiving from schools. Access to the aids, devices and necessary mobility and communication equipment to the disabled and elderly during the lockdown should also be ensured.

The bureaucracy in-charge of the welfare of the PwD must be sensitized and streamlined. Those states not yet having a state commissioner for PwD, or the chief commissioner for PwD as per the DEPwD guidelines, must be instated urgently. In fact, their appointment must precede with a background check on their understanding of the sensitivity, support, knowledge, training and motivation of the challenges and needs of the PwDs. Appointment of specialists/experts possessing these traits, can also be explored for this position.

The caregivers of these vulnerable sections must be sensitized and trained, and it must be ensured that they do not face any troubles in reaching out to their dependents. For this purpose, passes should be arranged; provisioning of e-passes for this purpose should be incorporated as one of the options. Precautionary measures and increased financial assistance should be provided to caregivers. Residents' Welfare Associations can volunteer to carry out tasks such as wellness checks on the elderly and people with disabilities, if there is a need for the same. Communities need to come together and extend their support in combating loneliness in isolation and assist in a linkage to Information and Communications Technology (ICT), with handholding.

NITI Aayog has felt the need for revision of the policies for older persons, and transgender persons. The policy needs to cover housing, income security, pension, and access to healthcare. It should also emphasize the concept of 'ageing in place' or 'ageing in own home'. For PwDs, there is a need for institutional architecture and policy framework requiring multi-sectoral action (NITI Aayog, 2018).

To conclude, in the prevailing health exigency, the elderly and PwDs face compounded challenges. It is the responsibility of the governments at all levels to work in tandem with each other as well as with civil society organizations to provide increased, emergency funding for programs that allow senior citizens and PwDs to remain healthy, anxiety-free and safe at home. We believe that through concerted action, India could set an example before the world and successfully contain this humanitarian crisis.

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Gendered Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This paper highlights that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown have together contributed to an intensification of the already existing gender inequalities and violence against women. They have now health threat outside the home, more household responsibilities and unpaid care work inside the home and rise in number of domestic violence cases. There is an urgent need to strengthen the leadership and ensure meaningful participation of women in all decision-making policies in addressing the COVID-19 and similar pandemics in future.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, COVID-19, Domestic Violence, Unpaid Care Work, ASHA workers

Background

COVID-19 and the ensuing lockdown has brought untold miseries in the lives of women. While there is a health threat looming large outside the home, inside the home there are compounded women's burden of household responsibilities and unpaid care work. In the present context, the importance of these officially called and

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socially defined ‘non-economic activities’ can be felt across the world with increasing demand for domestic and care work due to the pandemic, which has intensified the already existing gender inequalities and violence against women. The domestic help and all other service providers who would otherwise share the burden of household chores are locked down in their own homes as well. Therefore, in this situation, the bulk of the domestic work ranging from the responsibility of children- both school and non-school goers, spouses and elderly care, ensuring ration and supplies, preparation of meals and feeding them, catering to the demands of cooking different cuisines, cleaning and mopping the house, guaranteeing hygiene and sanitation, cleaning the utensils and clothes has occupied center stage in the lives of women, and has made the lives of women miserable. Importantly, in such a situation, those office-going women who are now working from home are finding their time, mental peace, energy, and motivation jeopardized as they are unable to give full attention to their office-work.

The exclusive responsibility of domestic work on women is one of the key constraints on women’s ability to work outside the home, which has gone unrecognized and uncounted by the male-dominated family, society and governments around the world. In other words, such labour of household work and caring is not incorporated while accounting the income of a country.

This article delves into questioning the gendered division of work at home and in the labour market as well as the non-recognition of domestic and care work as a paid economic activity through global and Indian accounts. To deal with the prevailing burden and frustration in shouldering the entire burden of household work and care requires immediate policy attention, which would ensure

gender equality, wage parity and dignity as well as justice to women at home and at the workplace (Mehta and Awasthi, 2019).

Feminist Perspectives on Gendered Division of Labour in the Household

In the 1960s and 1970s, several feminist scholars made optimistic predictions that the traditional unequal division of domestic tasks would soon be replaced by an equal division (Benson, 1968; Young and Wilmott, 1973). However, this is far from realization even in the third decade of the 21st century.

The exclusive and enforced responsibility of household work on women is one of the key constraints on women's ability and liberty to work outside the home. The existing social norms and assumptions dictate that a woman's primary duty is to take care of the house, and man is the bread winner of the household and in his capacity as household head he does not do any household or caring work, but at the same time makes decisions for every member of the family. This creates a masculine hegemony throughout the country and globally. In fact, a gender-conscious historiography led by feminist historians have pointed this out and highlighted the way in which social policies become shaped by 'assumptions' about sexual division of labour, power, and responsibility (Tinker, 2001).

While women's participation in economic activities has been rising over the years in urban areas, even in households where both husband and wife may be working, the domestic and care workload is excessively borne by the women (Dempsy, 1997). They need to consistently meet the demand of the elderly, children and

the husbands, parents-in-law, or siblings-in-law etc. The socialization of performing the household work and unpaid care is inculcated by the family from her childhood, where she is taught with teachings of ‘duty’ and ‘moral obligation’ to take care of younger siblings, and help in performing the daily tasks (Coltrane and Shih, 2009). Research has shown that the young girls are made to compromise their school education in favour of the male siblings. They are raised to be economically and otherwise depending on the male support and take care of the elderly family members. This gets compounded during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and when public services and healthcare systems fail.

Since 1990s, feminist economists have made consistent attempts to attribute monetary worth to the women’s household and unpaid care work (Nandi, 2017). Depending upon their schools of thought, one finds that they had varied opinion on the labour performed by women. They tend to consider wage labour as the only yardstick of recognizing work, the so-called productive work as work. Karl Marx went beyond the classic thinking of economists, but he also did not acknowledge household work and unpaid care work as major components of labour. Feminist economists drew attention to the gender inequality stemming from the intersection of capitalism and patriarchy. The unequal distribution of household work and unpaid care between women and men in the feminist analysis is being called unjust and is carried out in violation of the basic human rights of women.

Further, the household realm position itself on the range of unpaid work such as domestic and care work that is performed mainly by women in developing countries like India, which is regarded necessary for the functioning of life. Long hours of household work have been the very

reason why feminists have promoted the use of appropriate technology to reduce women's work burdens (Hennock, 2001). The following section provides insights on the reality of unpaid domestic and care work.

Women in Unpaid Domestic and Care Work: Insights from Global and Indian Statistics

Globally, women (4.1 hours) spend more than twice per day time on unpaid domestic and care work than men (1.7 hours). They perform three-fourth (76%) of the total time of unpaid care work per day, which is more than three times as much as men per day time on the same work. According to OECD statistics, even in industrialized countries such as USA women spend 1.7 times more time per day than men in unpaid domestic and care activities; and 1.8 times more time in UK. In India, women spend 6.8 times more time per day in unpaid work in the country than men; on an average, 352 minutes per day for women and 52 minutes per day for men. The Oxfam report 2019 estimates unpaid work done by women across the globe amounts to a staggering US \$10 trillion a year, which is 43 times the annual turnover of the world's biggest company Apple and more than thrice the annual income of India. The report also estimated that unpaid work performed by women for domestic and care work is worth 3.1% of the India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, the less visible domestic and care economy remain unaccounted in the national accounting system as economic activities.

Women in the paid and unpaid work are most vulnerable in the current pandemic situation. For example, amid the prevailing lockdown and pandemic, the government has announced under the Prime Minister Gareeb Kalyan Yojana, that 20,000 crore women would

receive rupees (Rs.) 500 each in their zero-balance accountsⁱ for the next three months, increase in MGNREGA wage from Rs. 202 from Rs. 182 per day, Rs. 1000 to 3 crore poor citizens, poor widows and poor disabled and Rs. 2000 paid as frontload to farmers in the month of April. These policies and initiatives to support the women and marginalized from the government of India, is rather just the tip of the iceberg. Rs. 500 for women for three months each is a very meagre amount for their economic unpaid care work in COVID-19 situation. Government has clearly lacked policies for women in the formal sector. Women in the lower and upper middle class who are facing severe risks of unemployment and lack of social security have not been addressed. Future employment opportunities for women post lockdown has also been neglected by the government so far. The government has hardly answered to women security and provision of a support system for unpaid work and other care work done by women. Disabled women have been addressed with a Rs. 1000 each, which amongst a national health emergency lockdown would not be practically sufficient for their medical and other necessities. The country has been facing millions of migrant workers (both women and men) stranded on the streets without any safety net mechanisms with hunger and meagre support from the economic initiatives of the government during months' long lockdowns. Women farmers and workers in the agricultural sector lack economic security, because of no land security and possession of land and properties. According to the World Economic Forum, women all around the world own only below 20% of the world's land. In India 74% women work in agriculture but only 13% are operational holders (Villa, 2017). This phenomenon has strongly affected women in agriculture in the country,

where they lack self-sufficient economic security and recognition for their basic rights own and control land and other property.

Millions of migrant workers are not provided transport services despite the official claims for doing so. Pregnant women and elderly who are highly vulnerable to the disease are taking huge pressure in the humanitarian crisis having to walk miles under heat and rain to reach home/safety/shelter. With no money in their pockets, many migrant workers are forced to stay under construction sites, with no transport and in starving conditions. Government action plans to reach the migrant workers through registration and access to help via phone calls, bank accounts and other means seems very impractical, with the basic fact that the migrant workers and many poor citizens have no access to phone calls or possess no smart phones and bank accounts.

There is no doubt that women's participation in paid work has been declining over the last 25 years. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2017-18 and earlier employment and unemployment surveys, conducted by the National Sample Survey (NSS), revealed the Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPR) for men have always been significantly higher than those for women, often double. Over the years, the gender gap in LFPR is rising, 28 percentage points (men: 54%, women: 26%) in 1999-00 to 38 percentage points (men: 56%, women: 18%) in 2017-18. One of the most common arguments against women's participation in labour market is their domestic and childcare responsibilities. As per the PLFS data, over 59% of the adult women were engaged in domestic and unpaid care activities in the country than only 1% for adult men, which is slightly higher in urban areas (60%). The domestic and unpaid care work activities ranging from cooking,

cleaning, routine household chores, and looking after children and the elderly. However, these unpaid domestic and care activities are not considered within the standard boundaries of the System of National Accounts, i.e. counted as economic activities when national income or GDP is measured. One of the interesting finding comes up from the NSSO 68th round (2011-12) on the Employment and Unemployment Situation in India survey is that up to 64% of women said they have no option than to taking up domestic and care work, since there is no one to carry out the domestic activities.

According to Ministry of Health there are approximately 76% of men are infected from COVID 19 whereas the percentage of women infected stands at 24% only. Men have been affected more than women. It is important, however, to point out a study by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2016), of all health workers in India, 38.0% were female, whereas only 16.8% of allopathic doctors 16.8% female. There were more female than male nurses and midwives, with females accounting for 83.4% of the nurse's category - accounting for 30.5% of all health workers (Anand and Fan, 2016). Globally women constitute 70% of workers in the health in social sector and are on the front line of the response to COVID-19 within this sector an average gender pay-gap is 28% which is likely to increase in times of financial crisis.

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) and Anganwadi Workers (AWWs)ⁱⁱ also constitute care workers in India; they play a major role in health and hygiene as well as the welfare of the poor and minorities. Unjustifiably, the government has neglected the need to respond to the internal lack of proper income distribution and therefore ensure economic equality (Majumdar, 2020). Their sad state of affairs is imminent from the wages they

receive: ASHA workers get an honorarium of Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 4,000 per month varying from state to state. Even with this meagre salary, the onus to pay for travel and stationery is on them. AWWs earn between Rs. 2,250 and Rs. 4,500 and Anganwadi helpers between Rs. 1,500 and Rs. 2,250 per month. India has been the last in its standing amongst the BRICS nations in its budget allocation for health care with a 3.5% of the total Gross Domestic Product. This has hugely influenced the health and conditions of the informal sector and unpaid care workers. Care workers, amongst which the significant majority are women, with no protective equipment, the government's neglect during COVID-19 has worsened their economic situations and personal safety, and they stand the risks of violence, discrimination, and the spread of the disease. In fact, India's exports of protective wears and facemasks came at an expense of the cost of safety and protection of health care workers and various other vulnerable minorities working on the ground-level in combating the spread of the virus.

Overall, the government of India has been widely appreciated for stringent measures of the lockdown of vast areas of the countries. Of course, these measures have saved numerous lives, but at the same time have deprived people under poverty line, mainly migrants, casual workers, daily wagers and the access to livelihood opportunities, institutional care and food with dignity. One of the worst outcomes of this pandemic has been a rise in in domestic violence against women. This is true not just in India but in many countries around the world. The next section provides a glimpse of this dire situation.

Unpaid Care Work and Domestic Violence against Women

Fueled by mandatory stay-at-home rules, social distancing, economic uncertainties and anxieties caused by the coronavirus pandemic, domestic violence against women has increased globally. For instance, countries like China, United States, Brazil, Tunisia, France and Australia and many others have reported cases of increased domestic violence and intimate partner violence (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2020; Godin, 2020; Berger, 2020; Morton, 2020; UN Women, 2020). India, is also showing similar trends, especially when it is infamous for being the fourth worst country (after United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Saudi Arabia) for gender equality (ranked by perception) (Radu, 2020; *USA News*, 2020). According to the Crime in India Report 2018, published by the National Crimes Research Bureau (NCRB), every 1.7 minutes a crime was recorded against women in India, every 16 minutes a rape was committed and every 4.4 minutes a girl is subjected to domestic violence (NCRB, 2018).

Within a few days of the lockdown, the National Commission of Women (NCW) noted a rise in the number of domestic violence and intimate partner violence complaints received via emails. According to the NCW, India, in the months of March, April and May 2020, the NCW received 813 complaints of domestic violence. During this period, a total of 1668 complaints were received by NCW for other forms of violence against women (example: bigamy/polygamy; denial of maternity benefits to women; dowry deaths; harassment of married women/dowry harassment; outraging the modesty of women/molestation; rape/attempt to rape; right to live with dignity; sexual assault and; sexual harassment) (NCW,

2020). It must be pointed out that a study on domestic violence during March and up to April 5, 2020, the total number of the complaints was 885 (Kumar et al., 2020). This means that crimes against women of the nature described above registered almost a 100% increase in just 45 days. There is an absolute certainty that real figure is likely to be more since the bulk of complaints come from women in the lower strata of society who send their complaints by post, as was stated by the NCW Chairperson (NDTV, 2020). This is mainly because a woman locked down with the abuser does not have access to a mobile phone or the space, and has very limited access to financial resources and social networks or even the confidence that she could call up police for help. In other words, all options of escape for the former from a violent situation of are closed. Thus, in this intensity of the impediments she would normally face has been exacerbated by the pandemic and the lockdown (Kumar et al., 2020).

We are at a loss to understand the reasons as to why for women the home has become the ‘sphere of fear and anxiety’. The agony and depression due to repeated physical and mental abuse has far reaching consequences including victims’ suicides. In fact, the intensity of abuse could even extend to child abuse. The various forms of such violence include as slapping, hitting, kicking and beating; sexual violence, including rape within marital relations and other forms of sexual attack; emotional (psychological) abuse, such as insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation by destroying things or otherwise, threats to harm and take away children; controlling behaviours, including isolating a person from family and friends; monitoring their movements; and restricting access to financial resources, employment, education or medical care. These often have lasting impact on the survivors as

research suggests that the trauma of abuse persists long after the violence has stopped. This often results in chronic health problems and developing risks of many diseases that arise from prolonged stress (Krug et al., 2002). It is disappointing to ponder that elected representatives and democratic governments in the country have failed to put domestic violence in their crisis management agenda of COVID-19 pandemic. We live in a time when masculinity proudly parades itself as sovereign authority.

The Way Forward

The above discussion demonstrates that there is an urgent need for recognition and awareness in our institutions, both formal and informal about the disproportionate rising burden of domestic and care activities of women. The prevalence of orthodox social norms has ensured domestic violence to continue unabated, yet grossly underreported. When government start putting together plans to address the COVID-19 crisis, it is important that addressing domestic violence and intimate partner violence must figure in the priority list. This recognition would go a long way in achieving dignity for women and gender equality within the masculine institutions that only recognize the work done by men.

The sharing of domestic and unpaid care activities by men need to be encouraged through sustained behavioural change measures such as motivational public awareness programmes, curriculum and pedagogy, and public engagement, communications, advocacy and research; and more important financial incentives and promotions in firms and organizations.

Services and care giving activities of ASHA workers and AWWs need to be included in the list of

‘essential services’ and providing them with all-possible support to combat coronavirus pandemic. The caregivers must be provided with financial and non-financial incentives and social protection.

Expansion in the reach and benefit of social assistance programmes that can substantially reduce women’s domestic work burden, such as cash transfers and providing LPG gas to poor women, under the *Ujjwala*ⁱⁱⁱ scheme. However, accessing the LPG refills has become increasingly difficult amid the financial difficulties caused by the coronavirus. There is an immediate need to introduce universal implementation of subsidized LPG under the scheme.

This will go a long way in building resilience of women and infants whose lungs can be damaged by exposure to smoke caused by cooking with solid biomass (Kelkar et al., 2019). Furthermore, the support through cash transfers is needed for women who are burdened with unpaid care and food provisioning responsibilities in the household.

Importantly, the concern for unpaid care work is not only because of increasing the visibility of unpaid work. What is needed are policy measures to alleviate the unpaid care burden on women and redistribution of this work between women and men. This would prove to be essential in keeping the unit of the family functional and without domestic violence against women.

The importance of domestic and unpaid care work needs to be included in the national accounting system as an economic activity; this inclusion is long overdue and is needed putting social and economic value to household work and unpaid care. Policies aimed at ensuring gender equality in labour force participation and gender wage

parity go a long way towards paving the way for dignity in life and livelihoods of women, as well as men.

Regular Time Use Survey of the time spent by women in unpaid work must be ensured, which will bring to light the gap in policies needed to address the rising need for care and tackle the huge disparity between women's and men's care responsibilities (Mehta and Awasthi, 2019).

As responsible members of the household, society and nation, we need to be alert and supportive to the scientific and medical fraternity as they find the cure for COVID-19; but we cannot discount the period of isolation which takes a disproportionate toll on the health and livelihoods of women and men.

The strategic planning for preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic must be grounded in strong gender analysis, considering gender roles and responsibilities in the dynamics of change of social norms. As has been repeatedly pointed out in feminist analyses of the COVID-19 that there is need to strengthen the leadership and meaningful participation of women in all decision-making policies in addressing the COVID-19 and similar pandemics in future.

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ⁱ Zero-balance bank accounts were encouraged by the Prime Minister of India in 2014 under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana. It is a financial inclusion program of Government of India open to Indian citizen, that aims to expand and make affordable access to financial services such as bank accounts, remittances, credit, insurance and pensions.

ⁱⁱAn ASHA is a community health worker and there are over 9 lakh such workers in India while there are over 35 lakh AWW in India.

ⁱⁱⁱ*Ujjwala* scheme or Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana was launched by Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi on 1 May 2016 to distribute 50 million LPG connections to women of below poverty line families.

Work and Livelihood Losses in the Urban Informal Sector

Balwant Singh Mehta¹ and Arjun Kumar²

Abstract

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown has compounded the challenges for the workers in the informal sector workers. This article provides evidence from the official data sources such as Periodic Labour Force Survey on the estimates jobs losses of informal workers in urban areas. It estimates the number of most vulnerable informal sector workers in urban areas by three ways (i) the most affected sectors; (ii) status of work and (iii) vulnerable occupations, where they are engaged in urban areas. The paper estimates that over 40 million informal workers may have lost their job in the current crisis.

Keywords: Livelihood, Employment, Informal Sector, COVID-19, Job Losses

The Global Scenario of Job Losses in Informal Economy

International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that globally more than 25 million jobs would be threatened due to the spread of coronavirus (ILO, 2020a). It is estimated that four out of five people (81%) in the global workforce of 3.3 billion are currently affected by full or partial workplace closure. The US, UK, Canada and most of the European and Asian countries have begun to register huge job losses leading to a significant rise in unemployment rate (Jamaica Observer, 2020; ILO,

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2020a). The ILO, in its report 'ILO Monitor 2nd edition: COVID-19 and the world of work- Updated Estimates and Analysis', describes COVID-19 as 'worst global crisis since World War II' (ILO, 2020b). The head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Kristalina Georgieva said the world faced the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s (BBC, 2020).

Most of the world's informal workers are from developing countries, and most of them would be worst affected by COVID-19 (ILO, 2020a). There are severe concerns for low-paid and low skilled informal workers in low- and middle-income countries, where the industries and services have a high proportion of such workers, who account for 61% of the global workforce or two billion people and they lack any social protection or safety net. This sudden loss of livelihood would be horrifying for them.

As per the ILO report, sectors such as food and accommodations, retail and wholesale, business services, construction, and manufacturing have experienced drastic effects with falling production and losses in employment hours and numbers. Combining 1.25 billion workers employed in these sectors, over one-third (37.5%) of the global workers are at high risk.

State of Affairs in India

The Indian economy, especially informal or unorganized sector, has been witnessing an unprecedented slowdown, downturn, and unemployment in recent months (Mehta and Kumar, 2019). This has aggravated due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and the lockdown (Kumar et al., 2020). Considering the vulnerable and life-risking situation of the migrant workers, mainly who works in informal sectors, poor and destitute, the governments, NGOs, employers, and even

the Supreme Court stepped in to cater to their plight (Mehta et al., 2020; Mehta et al., 2020). As a result, 26,000 shelters (for 1.5 million) and over 38,000 food camps were set up across the country in the initial weeks of the lockdown and which took care of more than 10 million people together for food and around two million for shelter, supported by the government (accounting for around four-fifth), NGOs and employers, as on 12 April 2020 (Press Information Bureau, 2020a). Further, millions of migrants returning to their homes by buses, trains and many on foot is expected to create two types of crisis. *First*, there will be rise in unemployment in the rural areas of the home states of the migrants such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar; and *second*, industries in urban areas in states like Maharashtra and Gujarat could face a labour shortage. In the absence of any official figures, it is difficult to estimate the total number of migrant workers, who have returned or will be returning to their native places, but some estimates show that India has around 40-50 million seasonal migrants.

The initial evidence of lockdown on employment can be seen from Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) report (CMIE, 2020). In the weeks after the lockdown, only a little over one-fourth (28%) i.e. 285 million people were working out of total working-age population of 1003 million, which was way behind than the corresponding figure (40%) i.e. 404 million workforce before the lockdown. This indicates that within the two-week period of lockdown by March end, around 119 million workers have lost their jobs in the country. The CMIE report also indicates a significant increase in the unemployment rate of 8.7% in March 2020, which is way higher than the government unemployment estimate at a 45-year high of 6.1% in 2017-18. This is the highest unemployment rate since September 2016, wherein the numbers of those who are unemployed have gone up by 6 million from 32 million to 38 million during the same period.

The unemployment rate soared during the lockdown period of last week of March at 23.8%. However, the CMIE report shows that unemployment rate in the month of April jumped to 23.5% and shot up to 27% in the week ended on May 3. This rate is much more than that of the United States (14.7% in April), which provides unemployment allowance assistance (Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor, 2020). However, most of the Indians cannot afford to remain unemployed due to poverty and the absence of unemployment allowance assistance by the state.

The spike in the unemployment rate in India clearly indicates the surge in job seekers because of huge jobs lost during the lockdown. The CMIE database estimates translate into a loss of 122 million jobs. Moreover, informal workers such as small traders, wage labourers and hawkers have been among the major losers of jobs. Since they make a living on their daily earnings, therefore, have been impacted the most by the nationwide lockdown. A prolonged shutdown is their worst nightmare. 91 million of these lost their employment in April 2020 (CMIE, 2020). Some estimates also this to have reached to 140 million and suggest that the lockdown has added to the suffering of already slowing down economy (*The Economist*, 2020).

Understandably, these numbers indicate that nationwide lockdown has been the biggest job-destroyer ever in the history of India. However, these estimates only reveal the impact on jobs during the lockdown period and should not be considered as a permanent loss of livelihood of those persons. Many of them may be able to get back to their employment status after the lockdown would be over. Indeed, many of them would also not be able to get their jobs back, such as informal workers, who involved in casual or contractual work and those who returned to their villages (Bijapukar and Shukla, 2020).

Nevertheless, CMIE estimates have many caveats as it is based on telephonic interviews with a smaller sample and likely to have a high probability of error. Thus, other sources such as estimates from the government, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) need to be examined for the comparison and understand the likely impact on informal workers during and after the lockdown period. The CMIE survey results may have estimation errors, but there are many anecdotal evidence that show substantial job losses in the country after the lockdown and the worst affected are the informal workers, who are facing a livelihood crisis.

Table 1: Top 10 Occupations for Urban Informal Workers (in Millions)

Rank	Occupation	Number
1	Shop Salespersons and Demonstrators	13
2	Construction Labourer	7
3	Domestic and Related Helpers	4
4	Manufacturing Labourer	3
5	House Keeping and Restaurant Services Workers	3
6	Painters & Building Structure Cleaners	3
7	Stall and Market Salespersons	2
8	Street Vendors and Related Workers	2
9	Transport Labourers	2
10	Garbage Collectors and Related Labourers	1
Total		40

Source: PLFS, 2017-18

The above discussion concludes that the worst affected informal workers are around 40 million, who are casual or daily wage workers involved in vulnerable occupations in urban areas, who may not get their employment or livelihood status for a longer period in the near future and are going to be trapped in deeper poverty. While the CMIE survey results may have estimations errors, but it is true that there are huge job

losses where the worst affected are the informal workers, who are facing livelihood crisis. Considering the data of migrant labourers, poor and destitute, as provided by the government, the governments, NGOs and even the Supreme Court stepped in to cater to their plight. As a result, 26,000 shelters (for 1.5 million) and over 38,000 food camps were set up across the country in the initial weeks of the lockdown and which took care of around 10 million people together.

Estimates of Job Losses in Urban Informal Economy

This article estimates the number of most vulnerable informal workers by three ways in the context of lockdown and its impact on jobs (i) the most affected sectors; (ii) status of work and (iii) vulnerable occupations, where they are engaged in urban areas in non-agricultural sector.

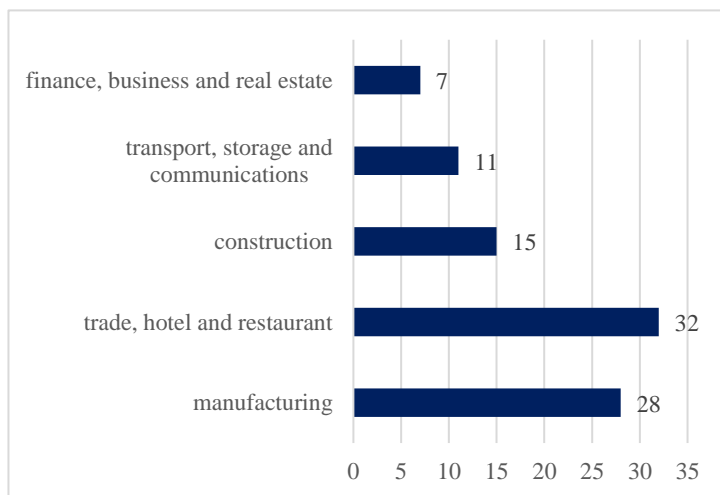
According to the PLFS, 2017-18, about 90% (or 419 million) workers are engaged in informal sector, out of the total 465 million workers, in the country. In magnitude, the informal workers in rural areas (298 million) comprise almost 2.5 times higher than urban areas (121 million). The workers in the informal sector in rural areas (95%), is significantly higher than urban areas (80%). This is primarily because of large number of informal workers are engaged in farm or agricultural activities (62%) in rural areas than only 8% in urban areas, which is likely to have less impact on their livelihood and employment by the lockdown than informal workers engaged in urban in non-farm sectors i.e. 92%.

These informal workers' livelihood is likely to be affected more by the lockdown because of the halt in economic activities. About 419 million such informal workers are at the risk of losing their livelihood and falling into deeper poverty. The impacts of coronavirus pandemic crisis and lockdown on

informal workers' jobs and livelihood are being increasingly felt in India (Nanda and Prasad, 2020).

To ascertain the estimates of the most affected sectors and workers from the PLFS, we have chosen top five affected sectors and top ten vulnerable occupations in urban areas. This is based upon the calculation computed by authors using PLFS 2017/18-unit record data. For arriving at the occupation wise estimates- National Classification of Occupations (NCO) 2004, National Industrial Classification (NIC) 2008, and, census adjusted figures have been applied.

Figure 1: Estimated number of informal workers involved in five sectors that are most affected in urban areas, PLFS 2017-18 (in millions) (total: 93 million)



Source: Computed by authors using PLFS 2017-18-unit record data.

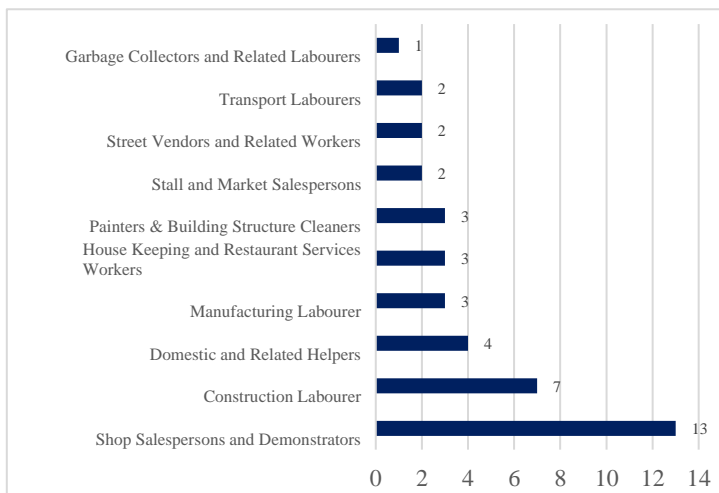
The analysis from the unit record data of the PLFS 2017-18 shows that, in urban areas about 93 million informal workers are involved in five sectors that are most affected, namely, manufacturing (28 million); trade, hotel and restaurant

(32 million); construction (15 million); transport, storage and communications (11 million); and finance, business and real estate (7 million). As many as 50% of these informal workers are engaged in self-employment, 20% are casual workers on daily wages, and 30% are salaried or contract workers without any social safety net (National Statistical Office, 2019).

Due to the lockdown, all economic activities (with exception of essential and emergency services) related to physical labour at workplaces are banned. Therefore, about 93 million urban informal workers in these five sectors have been most hit. This is the largest informal sector worker group next only to agriculture and allied activities and constitute the size of population greater than most of the countries in the world, for example, UK, Australia, Japan, etc. In urban areas, the informal workers tend to work in sectors that directly impacted by lockdown measures and carry a high risk of virus infection such as rag picking, street vending, food stalls, construction, transport, and domestic help. The current nationwide lockdown in India has severely impacted informal workers significantly and forced many of them to either stay in shelters or return to their native places (Press Information Bureau, 2020b).

The analysis shows that the worst affected informal workers are around 40 million, who are casual or daily wage workers involved in top ten vulnerable occupations in urban areas, who may not get their employment or livelihood status for an extended period and are threatened with getting trapped in deeper poverty. These are small shop salespersons and demonstrators (13 million), labourers in: construction (7 million), manufacturing (3 million) and transport (2 million), domestic helps (4 million), housing keeping and restaurant service workers (3 million), painters and building structure cleaners (3 million), stall and market salespersons (2 million), street vendors (2 million), and garbage collectors (1 million).

Figure 2: Estimated number of casual or daily wage workers involved in vulnerable occupations in urban areas, PLFS 2017-18 (in millions) (total: 40 million)



Source: Computed by authors using PLFS 2017-18-unit record data.

If half of those who have lost their jobs were main or single earning family members of an average of five-member family size (as per Census of India 2011) households, around one-third (60 million households or 300 million people) of India's households, could be facing a severe livelihood crisis.

Government Initiatives

The Prime Minister announced a special economic and comprehensive package of Rs. 20 lakh crores on 12 May 2020. As part of the economic measures “*Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan*” (Self-Reliant India Campaign), the Finance Minister announced many short- and long-term measures for employment generation and development. This is about 10%

of the total India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The government has provided much relief to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which contribute about 29% of the national GDP and provide employment to more than 110 million people. There are many short term, medium term and long-term goals of the announced package (Press Information Bureau, 2020). These are listed below:

Short Term

- Loan up to 20% of outstanding loan of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector
- Payment of outstanding for small companies within 45 days
- Three months' relief in Employee Provident Fund Organization (EPFO) contribution
- Facility to collect fund from State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) for the states to provide relief to migrant labourers
- 7200 new self-help groups formation to help the urban poor
- An additional grant of Rs. 40 billion to provide employment to migrant labourers returning home.
- Modification in the labour laws for fixing minimum wages
- Two months more ration for migrant labourers

Medium Term

- Government guarantee for loan of Rs. 3 trillion for MSME sector
- Moratorium on principal payment for one year, and loan for four years to MSMEs
- Availability of an additional loan of Rs. 200 billion to the distress MSMEs

- Rs. 75 billion special liquidity to Non-Bank Financial Company (NBFCs) housing finance companies and Micro Finance Institutes (MFIs)
- Six months' extension in contract period to contractors of other central organizations including Railways, Highways, Central public works department (CPWD)
- Relief to real estate companies from Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) law, Tax deducted at source (TDS) and Tax Collected at Source (TCS) rate cut
- Decision to extend the period for filing income tax return
- Relief in filing return under dispute trust scheme
- Implementation of on national one ration card system
- Implementing portability of ration card to help with Mudra Shishu Loan
- Announcement of providing ration to the migrant workers in other states as well
- To provide loan of Rs. 500 billion to street vendors in the street

Long Term

- Establishment of Fund of Fund of Rs. 500 billion for MSMEs, changed the definition of MSMEs
- Only Indian companies are allowed in the global tender of Rs. 20 billion
- Rs. 90 billion provided to Distribution Company (DISCOMs) to get out of the crisis
- Announcement of allocation of 300 billion for agriculture works through National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)
- A system of providing uniform minimum wages to workers across the country
- The appointment letters to the migrant labourers

- Under the labour laws more rights to inter-state migrant labourer
- To provide social security protection to the workers in the unorganized sector
- To set up housing project to give the workers a rental house, ad helping state and central level organizations to set up cheap housing projects
- The system of subsidizing loans on home loans under the Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS) to the middle class under the CLSS to the middle class will be implemented by March 2021
- Kisan Credit Card (KCC) to 250 million of farmers
- Tariff policy reform in electricity sectors, customer will get round the clock electricity and timely payment to power generation companies.
- Rs. 8100 crores for Viability Gap funding to social infrastructure projects
- Invitation to private sector in space sector
- One trillion rupees will be spent on development of infrastructure facilities for agriculture.
- Rs.100 billion scheme for Micro Food Enterprises, Rs. 200 billion loan under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) for fishermen, which would provide around 55 lakh people employment
- Rs. 150 billion for Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Fund, Rs. 400 billion for Herbal Cultivation
- Freedom of farmers to sell their produce anywhere in the country
- Rs. 5 billion for beekeeping
- Amendment in Essential Commodities Act so that farmers get better price for their produce.
- Approval of commercial mining in coal sector. Preparation for handing over 50 coal blocks to private sector in the first

phase. Measures to make the private sector attractive in coal gasification and coal bed methane. Preparation of 500 mining blocks to be given to private sector.

- 74% increase in foreign investment limit in defense sector, purchase of defense equipment in a time bound manner. Investment of 500 billion rupees, improvement in mining sector. Preparation to provide more airspace to civil aviation companies in the country.
- PPP model to build more airports with private sector.

Some states like Uttar Pradesh have eased their labour laws to provide an opportunity for industrial investment and employment generation for small and medium industries and have started skill mapping of migrant workers to ensure that they are provided with appropriate employment opportunities within the state. If these goals are implemented, this package can prove to be an effective solution to rescue the country from this crisis and move towards a ‘self-sufficient’ nation with sustained economic growth and employment generation.

However, *The Economist* remarked that most of the stimulus was made up either of previously announced measures, or that of the Reserve Bank of India to spur lending. Estimates of the actual new fiscal commitment by the Modi government range from a tiny 0.7% of GDP to 1.3%, which is something very distant from the publicized 10% (*The Economist*, 2020; Press Information Bureau, 2020).

Way Forward

Besides these informal workers, many persons involved in the organized sector (unregistered firms) who may be not jobless at present but could find themselves without a job after the lockdown period is over, if many enterprises refused to take them back. Many self-employed persons like street vendors

and other small entrepreneurs may not be left with the capital to restart their businesses, and many may not return from their native places.

Of these, the casual workers are the most vulnerable due to the unpredictable nature of their work and daily-wage payment, which are highest in the construction sector. So, all these regular salaried or contractual employee, those who are currently not working, and skilled workers and petty shopkeepers who may be sitting idle at home or return to their native places or staying in shelter homes may not be able to recover their jobs once the lockdown period is over. Added precautions like social distancing, contact tracing, and strict health controls over entry at the workplace and market would also impact the employer-worker relationship, thereby proving to be a massive departure from the casual business as usual approach.

There is a silver lining for gig work (such as online delivery services), highly skilled professional, and technology interface sectors, which has been positively impacted by the pandemic crisis. Nonetheless, their contribution to the addition in the workforce is estimated to be minimal to substantially offset the overall losses in job and work (*The Economic Times*, 2020). Less than one-tenth of the workforce, those in regular salaried or about essential services businesses and self-employment, will continue to receive their regular income (with caveats of further lay-offs, trim or spur in the salary/income, e.g. many government employees' salaries would be revised downwards and in private sectors, adjustments would be done owing to the non-revenue generation, and, rise in revenue of those engaged in essential commodities supplies) (Nayyar, 2020).

So, the government today has dual challenges to provide immediate assistance to: first, informal workers who have lost their jobs, and second, to those who are already

unemployed and are looking for jobs, with an added burden of the migrant workers' conundrum, who have returned to their homes leaving the destination places. Apart from assisting informal workers, who are migrants, their families for whom s/he is the sole earner need to be considered, as they await the assistance from the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana package and Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan out soon to improve upon the inclusion of all (Impact and Policy Research Institute, 2020; Kumar et al., 2020).

The lackadaisical response of the Ministry of Labour and Employment showcases its insensitivity to the state of affairs on the current pandemic crisis in (especially pertaining to data, registries or mapping of beneficiaries, policy and scheme related levers or planning). The real-time implementation and fulfilling the promises on the ground as well as monitoring and evidencing using dynamic and responsive system is urgently required. The time to demonstrate seriousness in attaining the 'Antyodaya' through Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) - Aajeevika and the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM), Skill India, Digital India, Smart City, RURBAN mission, etc. is now (Debroy and Watal, 2020).

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New World Order and New India: The Uncertain Geopolitics

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Abstract

Coronavirus has led to the unfolding of a new world order and at the same time, a disintegration of the hitherto new world order with a dream of global integration and global governance as espoused by the then President of the United States (US) George H. W. Bush, after the end of the Cold War. Reeling under the duress of COVID-19, countries all over the world virtually stopped all their business-as-usual interactions inspired by globalization. The rapid pace of movement through international air, water and land routes gradually came to a sudden and a screeching halt, with a period of few weeks between February and March 2020. This article attempts to understand the various facets of emerging geopolitical realities obligated by COVID-19, while situating the history of a New World Order concept. It situates the unique position that India is in vis-à-vis the global pandemic and its capacity of ensuring a healthy and a peaceful world order by abiding to the tenets of “Vashudhaiv Kutumbkam” (the world is one family).

Keywords: Coronavirus, New World Order, Geopolitics, India

Introduction

Contemporary world is a testimony to the ongoing ‘mega-changesⁱ’ or dramatic disruptions and sweeping developments in social, political, economic, environmental, and technological spaces (Franklin, 2012). These upheavals have one pivotal reason—the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which originated in China

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and within a matter of few weeks engulfed almost the whole world. In other words, an invisible strand of virus has waged a war against all nations of the world. On the one hand, this has forced nations to focus to its domestic constituencies and combating the spread of the virus within their borders, it has also generated debates surrounding a new post-pandemic world order, on the other. Some narratives of countries claiming an edge over the other, some resorting to isolationism and nationalism and others confident on the multilateral school of international order have begun to appear. By discussing the concept of a new world order when it was first announced in 1990, and assessing its 21st century realities, this article discusses how COVID-19 has begun to shape international politics. It also situates India's position amid the COVID-19 and the post-COVID-19 world order.

Post-Cold War New World Order

The optimistic rhetoric of a new world order was first presented by former President of the US, George H.W. Bush. Amid the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (Gulf War I, 1990-91), he addressed a joint session of the US Congress, and outlined his goals of building lasting foundations of a new world order. Interestingly, this speech was made on 9/11 (1990), wherein he called for “a new era-freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, east and west, north and south, can prosper and live in harmony” (Bush, 1990).

The opportunity to fulfil his (American) dream of leading the world towards a new world order came soon after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, where the US became the *de facto* leader of the free world (Stokes, 2018). Speaking at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in on September 23, 1991, he highlighted that the liberal world had reaped the benefits of free markets with high levels of prosperity, growth, and

happiness as against the centrally planned economies. He sought to delegate the responsibilities upon the United Nations (UN) to offer a new lease of life to institutions of freedom, and to play a crucial role in the quest for a new world order. While he underscored that this process would not entail any US “intention of striving for a *Pax Americana*”, he did mention American engagement and leadership to create a *Pax Universalis* or Universal Peace (Bush, 1991). Therefore, he dismissed any ideas that the post-Cold War period would see the US retreating into isolationism.

Co-founder of the theory of neoliberalism in international relations Joseph Nye Jr cautioned that the above articulation of a new world order was “messy, evolving and not susceptible to simple formulation or manipulation”, where nations of the world were faced with impending uncertain futures. Amid the high ideals of the liberal democratic transnational world order, Nye warned that ‘protectionist pressures’ would increase all over the world (Nye Jr, 1992). The next section discusses the realities of the new world order in the 21st century, which affirms Nye’s caveat, wherein the US itself has begun to tread on the path of nationalism and protectionism.

21st Century New World Order Realities

The post-Cold War thinking of the concept of a new world order rested on the assumption that the world’s major powers would eventually converge towards norms and institutions towards which the world’s major powers would eventually converge. When globalization was at its helm, many believed that economic connectedness, where the virtuous cycle of due to the West-led low-cost manufacturing in the emerging economies would contribute to the development of the latter and simultaneous benefits for the Western companies and consumers (OECD, 2013). Gradually, all the countries of the world would recognize

the benefits of this global interconnectedness and enable a convergence of their goals and reduce the likelihood of international conflicts. However, this has turned to be more of an ideal thinking, where the faith in the mutuality of benefits has dwindled.

The world has already begun to grapple with a geo-economic pattern of wavering of support to globalization by the geopolitical narrative of growing protectionism (World Economic Forum, 2018). Populist and authoritarian and terror networks have diffused across the world and has indicated a movement towards the imminent failure of the post-Cold War liberal international order (Altman, 2007; Passi and Pant, 2018). Growing aspirations of the countries for redressing the past wrongs done unto them (real or perceived), have often been accompanied by nationalist agendas and their projection of themselves as strong states. As a result, several billions of dollars have gone into demonstrating their military might to the world. China, for example, seeks its great rejuvenation to put the country's "century of humiliation" firmly behind it (Griffiths, 2019). It has a deeply embedded desire and aspiration to enhance its role and authority in redefining the priorities, rules, norms, and approaches of the international order and, as such, to undermine the dominance of the West, especially that of the US (Zhenglong, 2015). US President Donald Trump seeks to "make America great again" after decades of being "taken advantage of" in the liberal international order (Trump, 2017; Norloff, 2018).

While the new post-Cold War-US-led, liberal order brought enormous benefits in terms of increasing domestic wealth, but it also increased the country's exposure to foreign competition and contributed to a gradual erosion of its relative economic dominance (Ahmed and Bick, 2017). Trump's "America First" semantics have seemed to suggest that his administration would turn its back on America's crucial role in supporting the international economic and security order, for

which it did strove hard to establish in the years after 1945. This turned out to be true, when he constantly cited the ills of the international institutions, and withdrew the US from multilateral arrangements like the Paris Climate Accord (in 2017), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (in 2017) and United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) (in 2018) and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the "Iran nuclear deal" (in 2018). He abandoned the US support to the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, forced renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) into a United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) (in 2018), and expressed resentment with the working of the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Health Organization (WHO) and the comprehensive UN system.

Looking at how the US had consistently tried to 'integrate' China into the liberal international order and instead generated for itself consequential challenges to its primacy in the world, scholars pointed out the need to revise the American grand strategy vis-a-vis China. Such a strategy must be centered around balancing the rise of Chinese power (Blackwill and Tellis, 2015). Trump has long accused China of engaging in unfair trade practices and for manipulating its currency to reap huge profits from global exports. Throughout his term as the President, we have witnessed growing threats of Sino-US trade war. There are concerns that such dangers could create geopolitical fractures and lead to consolidation of strong-state politics, major power tensions and small-state disruptions in an increasingly disordered world (World Economic Forum, 2018).

The Chinese President Xi Jinping articulated his views on the type of international order that China is pursuing: "a community of common destiny for all mankind" (Jinping, 2017). This concept is established on the assumption that the international society has evolved into a community of common destiny due to the collective challenges faced by humanity. His idea of the community is one

which there are equal partnerships based on equality among all sovereign states, inclusive development through collective policy coordination, universal security through joint actions against global security challenges, and the prospect that transcends all differences and maximizes benefits for all (Jinping, 2017; Limin, 2017).

Chinese actions and its lofty ideals of creating a community of common destiny seems to be poles apart. This is evident from its vigorous maneuvers in finding international partners to support and accept its Belt and Roads Initiative (BRI). The official goals of the BRI include: promotion of an orderly and free flow of economic factors, highly efficient allocation of resources and deep integration of markets; encouraging the countries along the Belt and Road to achieve economic policy coordination and carry out broader and more in-depth regional cooperation at higher standards; and jointly creating an open, inclusive and balanced regional economic cooperation architecture that benefits all (National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, 2015). However, the ambitiousness of some of these plans has raised concerns that they might exacerbate conflicts with partner states. For instance, it runs the old risk of rejection by the recipient countries due to debt traps created, as well as the risk of imperial overstretch for China, adding to the vulnerability of lower-income countries (Sun, 2018). This situation would worsen in the event of deterioration of bilateral relations of these countries with China in the years/decades to come.

BRI's massive scale of expansion amid its bullying demeanour to press for territorial and maritime claims have created concerns of its neighbouring countries like Japan and India (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020; Chakma, 2019). While both countries have spoken against this expansionism at various fora, they have avoided a hedging policy

to bring in other countries like the US, Australia or the European states, which could heighten pre-existing tensions with China.

Meanwhile, in an attempt to focus on transformation of Russia's international status from the wreckage of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Putin has used his policy in Syria to transpose himself as a leading foreign policy actor, with the ability to shape military outcomes and geopolitical balances. Sino-Russian relations have witnessed a camaraderie and both their rapport with the West, especially the US have deteriorated. Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea was an unabashed violation of recognized norms of non-intervention and respect for the sovereignty of other countries. This led to the imposition of a huge US-EU-led sanctions against individuals and businesses (*BBC News*, 2014).

It is not just the US, China and Russia who are seeking to re-create a new world order, but countries with a nationalistic theme can be seen around the world. For instance, United Kingdom's decision to regain control by exiting the European Union, Japan's nationalism under Shinzo Abe, destruction of pluralism in Turkey as Erdogan deals with his domestic and international opponents, among several others (European Union External Action, 2017).

Countries like Russia, China, and North Korea, have made it a habit to violate the rules and precedents of the existing open liberal international order, and have sought to create a discourse of their own, especially in their immediate neighbourhoods, where they wield considerable influence. With nationalistic fervor running high in these countries, they have compromised respect for global norms and peaceful international interactions over their self-interests. Apart from rogue and failed countries who have committed themselves to disrupting a civilized world order, there are violent non-state actors like radical jihadist groups, most prominently the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. Time and again they have succeeded in holding the world order of

rules and peace to a ransom (Lieber, 2018). Thus, the hitherto existing rules-based international law and order has steadily witnessed a decline in terms of its respect as well as in practice by several countries of the world. The next section discusses how the already eroding post-Cold War world order has become intensified with the spread of the coronavirus disease in over 200 countries of the world.

Coronavirus-directed World Order

In real-politik world order is the product of a stable distribution of power among the major states (Nye, 1992). Instead of leading to any such stable global consolidation and coordination, the global spread of coronavirus has led to an abeyance of the concept of internationalism, where each country has closed its borders and is tending to itself. With enormous socio-economic implications and the urgent need to cater to domestic constituencies for alleviating the mass sufferings of the population due to COVID-19, some scholars have suggested that the concept of an international community might cease to exist as each nation is vigorously looking inwards (Narayanan, 2020).

The implications of the virus that “supposedly” began from a wet market in Wuhan, led to the chickens go to roost in almost all countries of the world in varied proportions. It has been argued that closer the proximity and linkages of any country with China in terms of tourism, trade and investment, the greater has been the number of persons infected with the coronavirus (Ghosh, 2020).

Existing international institutional arrangements have never failed in any international crises to such an extent as this. The World Health Organization (WHO) has been under deep criticism for having failed to measure up to the grave challenge posed by the pandemic. Their international reputation has been compromised with charges of bias and for grossly underestimating

the nature of the epidemic, which could have been contained if it had acted on time. Questions have since arisen over whether signals were missed or if the WHO overindulgent with China declared it to be a pandemic only on March 11, 2020. In fact, with over a month into the spread of the disease in China, and oblivion of the inchoate disaster, the WHO director-general on January 28, 2020, Tedros Adhanom, met Chinese President Xi Jinping in China (WHO, 2020). They exchanged pleasantries and maintained obscurity of the lethal nature of the virus which had its origins in that very country.

While he was initially reticent about the severity of the impacts of the virus, Donald Trump's overtures soon changed when the number of cases began to climb in the US. As the country became the epicenter of the infection, he has furiously and unapologetically referred to the coronavirus as the *Chinese* virus (Viala-Gaudefroy and Lindaman, 2020). Embarrassed and provoked by this remark, China retorted with an aggressive propaganda campaign calling coronavirus as a Western anti-China bioweapon (Yuan, 2020). Such war of words and his dissatisfaction with the WHO in being timid, and for downplaying the dangers and in allowing China to promote "disinformation" about the virus that led to a global outbreak, which if acted timely, could have contained the spread and thus its negative impacts around the world led him to put on hold the US funding to the WHO (Mason and Duran, 2020). He maintained that the WHO "must be held accountable" for the "mismanagement of the coronavirus pandemic" (Trump, 2020).

In retrospect, the coronavirus has exposed the fault lines in the global institutions and evidenced them to either weak and politically compromised, in the case of the WHO, or all-but-irrelevant, in the case of the UN. It has restored or hardened borders, blocked migration patterns, decentralized power from the international to national and the national to local. And it has incited a renewed great power rivalry, with prospects of an

enduring US-China Cold War amid the already prevailing trade war between them. In all this, international institutions and countries of the world would be the first casualties. Those countries who welcomed the BRI for their economic and infrastructure development have witnessed a standstill with the closure of borders and incomplete work. On the other hand, it continues to flex its muscles in the South China Sea (Mollman, 2020). Such events are testimony of China's indecorous attitude of taking advantage of a situation where the nations of the region are fighting the virus and are wounded by its rampant negative socio-economic fallouts. This is reflective of its complete abhorrence of the accepted civilized norms of global order.

Amid the chaos created by the coronavirus, the US and European countries have begun to look inwards. This could terminate the world order existing since the 1940s. With the weakening of the US economy due to the coronavirus, its capacity and intent to play a critical role in world affairs is certain to diminish. The main beneficiary of this geopolitical turnaround is likely to be China, a country that does not quite believe in playing by the rules of international conduct. Europe, in the short and medium term, will prove incapable of defining and defending its common interests, let alone having any influence in world affairs. Germany, which may still retain some of its present strength, is already turning insular, while both France and a post-Brexit United Kingdom will be out of any position of international influence as of now. Several countries apart from India, such as Australia and Germany, have begun to restrict Chinese foreign direct investment in companies and financial institutions in their countries, recognizing the inherent danger of a possible Chinese hostile takeover of their critical assets. Many countries have announced the re-location or closure of their enterprises in China.

The hitherto liberal world order may be compromised in the post-COVID-19 times where an omnipotent state could become a reality, with liberty being the center of all jeopardy. It is

reflective of a Chinese system writ large. Further, the coronavirus has provoked serious doubts on the benefits of globalization (Douthat, 2020). Unfazed by criticism of misinforming the world about the impending health disaster which originated in its country, it has sought to utilize the opportunity that it has successfully contained and eliminated the virus from its soil. While any such Chinese claims cannot be trusted, yet it has used its manufacturing capability to its geo-economic advantage. It has offered and sent medical aid and COVID-19 related paraphernalia to several countries of the world to enable them to meet their current pandemic threat. In turn, it seeks to gain a geopolitical and geo-economic advantage by this action. It has begun to take advantage of faltering financial capacities of national institutions around the world, amid the scaled-down value of assets. India, for example, received a rude shock when the Peoples' Bank of China acquired a 1% stake in India's HDFC, when the latter's stocks were experiencing a sharp decline (*The Hindu*, 2020). The next section analyses the various facets in which India would likely adjust, adapt, and direct a COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 world order.

India in a COVID-19 and Post-COVID-19 World

With China looking out for all options to steal the show in demonstrating its 'concern' to help the world including the South Asian region to combat COVID-19, India is faced with the dilemma on concentrating on providing domestic health infrastructure and a challenge to Prime Minister Modi's SAARC initiative. It faces the prospect of being isolated, with the Beijing winning new friends and contacts across a region deeply impacted by the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Certainly, there is no room for complacency.

Likewise, India's leverage in West Asia has greatly diminished with its large expatriate community, who are among

the hardest hit by the spread of coronavirus and consequent fall in the oil prices and economic downturn, and have been stranded due to job losses. Many of the latter have either returned or may seek repatriation in the near future, back to the host country. Going ahead it would substantially reduce the inflow of foreign funds to India from the region. Rather, continued efforts at looking beyond immediate horizons will be required to adjust and foresee further changes to the global strategic landscape (Jaishankar, 2019).

With the growing disappointment with Chinese actions, several global companies have announced the winding up of their operations in China. Amid this changing global economic order, India can harness this as an opportunity and undertake appropriate measures to ensure India presents itself as a preferred alternative destination for investment. India's eastern states could be critical and most viable as they have all four factors of business in abundance: namely, human capital, social capital, natural capital and an improving physical capital. This part is relatively less explored and can be the fulcrum of development of the region in the post-COVID world. Whether India will be a net winner or loser depends on the sensitivities of the coefficients of the economic variables, the dynamics of the global order, and the "soft power" that the nation can wield in the international domain (Ghosh, 2020). India's internationally acclaimed virtues of being a peace-loving and a tolerant nation, which reaches out to countries in need be it for health and medical emergencies like the COVID-19, or for disaster relief, or for peacekeeping operations. It has maintained a track record of protecting and preserving the world to the best of its capacities and adhered to its ancient values of *Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam* (the world is one family).

Today India has articulated its desire to be a leading power in the international system without inhibitions, a power that is a rule-maker, not a rule-breaker (unlike China). India has long sought accommodation into the global order as a major power but

has recently been reckoned it as a force which is now a part of the global high table. However, until it is universally recognized and receives its due place in international decision-making institutions like the UN Security Council with equal powers, the post-World War II international system will continue to be challenged by Indian decision-makers. India's pragmatism in diplomatically yet strictly articulating an alternative rational normative framework a rational voice in the international platforms and engagements could be India's unique contribution to upgrade the idea of an emerging multipolar world order, which is more equitable, demand-led, participative framework for global politics, where it has all the potential and capacity to be a key stakeholder in most regional and global changes. India has bright prospects of redefining a new world order in terms of national security, economic priorities, health protocols and systems, compact and self-sufficient supply chains, ecological sustainability etc. It certainly missed out on such leadership when the present post-World War II world-order was established, but with the present leadership, the prospects are promising as the country paces towards becoming a *New India*.

Conclusions

Together with its BRI, and a virtual economic and substantial stranglehold across the world, along with the allegations of coronavirus being a Chinese 'manufactured' virus provides qualitative evidence of a well-planned move by China to prepare the way for a Sino-centric multilateral globalization framework, holding the world to a ransom. But a temporary halt to globalization posited by the COVID-19 does not mean that the liberal order would surrender to a new post-liberal era. Neither would the ideological and institutional globalism disappear. But certainly, in the post-pandemic world order, both liberalism and

globalism may seem more like optimistic utopian ideologies, proven incapable of inspiring hope.

Wary of the global disorder presented by the coronavirus, veteran diplomat Henry Kissinger suggested a three-point formula for the US to deal with the situation. *One*, lead with a new Marshall Plan as a part of the global fight against infectious diseases. *Two*, revive not just the US but a dangerously contracting global economy. *Three*, safeguard principles of the liberal world order, which ensure security, order, economic wellbeing and justice for all (Kissinger, 2020).

Finally, it is important for India to focus on creating a stable and peaceful post-COVID-19 international order because we have all witnessed how in a world of transnational interdependence, international disorder created by an invisible strand of coronavirus can hurt and disturb the world population.

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ⁱ According to *The Economist*, mega-change is “change on a grand scale, happening at remarkable speed.”

**Housing and Habitat Planning:
Ubiquitous Global Implementation**

Ziming Li¹ and Aditi Madan²

Recent COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the rapid spread of novel Coronavirus causing global concern about housing security and conditions. Due to the lockdown of cities and the risks of unemployment, the low-income families and those inhabiting informal settlements have been left helpless and at risk of being evicted with almost little or no money.

Rent is presently the biggest expense for households accounting on an average for one-third of their income (OECD, 2019). COVID-19 has exposed the housing paradox; houses sit empty in a time when people are in a desperate need of shelter (Sharif and Farha, 2020). According to a recent study undertaken by the Princeton's Evictions Lab, Florida ranks 28th out of 50 at protecting the rights of tenants in response to the coronavirus. Out of the 2.5 million households dependent on a regular salary to pay the rentals for their rented accommodation (Shimberg Center for Housing Studies, 2017), more than 1.5 million have filed unemployment claims since mid-March, with many people being thrown out jobs in the wake COVID-19. Even though Gov. Ron DeSantis signed an executive order suspending evictions and foreclosures for 45 days, some of these households still will encounter the threats of eviction in the near future (O' Donnell, 2020). Therefore, a deeper structural change in housing system should be considered (Capps, April 2020). In India, the issue of

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shelter deprivation and vacant housing has been emerging in recent decades (Kumar, 2016).

Housing is also fundamentally connected to public health, built environment and sustainable habitat in cities (Kumar, 2015). COVID-19 raises a fundamental question on how we manage the dense and mobile population in megacities and urbanization in the global South. Mumbai has 76,790 people per square mile, Tokyo 12, 296 people per square mile, Barcelona 12,579 people per square mile, Lagos 47,027 people per square mile, Shenzhen 44, 464 people per square mile, Bogota 35,000 people per square mile and Shanghai 34,718 people per square mile (Kolb, 2019). In India, almost half of the urban population lives in houses with per capita space of less than a single room (Khan and Abraham, 2020); 17.4% urban households living in informal settlements (Census of India, 2011). Most of these families living in slums and informal settlements are still lack basic facilities such as access to water, electricity, adequate sanitation, proper drainage, waste management, secure tenure, house durability, and sufficient living space (UN-Habitat, 2003; Mukherjee, Sundberg and Schutt, 2020). These housing conditions are challenging the effectiveness of prevention based on the high standard of hygiene and social distancing.

Rethinking housing and habitat planning as a prevention and cure is significant, it will become a key for survival in the long term (Sharif and Farha, 2020). Many diseases are known to have shaped cities through developments in urban planning and management and sanitation systems in response to outbreaks (Klaus, 2020). Case in point is SARS which made people think about cities and connectivity as a fundamental factor and Ebola, which made people think about the coexistence of cities in the Global North and South (Klaus, 2020). At present, COVID-19 is joining a long list of contagious diseases with its likelihood of leaving its marks on the urban spaces and its design.

It is critical for the governments of multiple levels to collaboratively address the pre-existing global housing crisis which has affected 1.8 billion people across the globe, even before the pandemic (Sharif and Farha, 2020). Governments and civil societies need to come together using a holistic approach to ensure the collective right to affordable, accessible, and adequate housing and support recovery of the most vulnerable while building back the cities better.

During the critical emergent phase, local governments must take substantial measures to protect vulnerable communities from homelessness by securing the right to adequate housing for all through moratoriums on evictions, deferrals of mortgage payments, postpone eviction court proceedings, introduce of rental stabilization or reduction measures, prohibit utility shut-offs, create emergency funds, establish cash transfers, provide handwashing facilities and health care services in informal settlements. Essentially, they should focus on helping homeless and marginalized groups access more housing opportunities to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and other social risks in the long run.

As per the recovery phase, the concerns about the most vulnerable groups are also important when governments plan to revive economy in the context of post-COVID-19 new normal. Initially, it is necessary to evaluate the fiscal gaps between current mitigation actions and the urgent needs of the poor families at the household or grassroots level. Later, the impact of lockdown on vulnerable families and housing provisions in the long run should also be projected from neighbourhood to regional level. It requires a holistic, inclusive, and organized approach that could engage municipal governments, NGOs, communities, and private sectors effectively to fill up the knowledge and monetary gaps between housing demand and supply from the bottom to top. Furthermore, such a timely public-private partnership should aim at alleviating

poverty, reducing unemployment, and providing affordable housing with basic infrastructure, public services, and ration at the state and national levels. In addition to the vertical fiscal transfer and orders within one state, the institutional incentives for attracting external funds from private sectors or global collaborations through spatial planning experiences sharing and multilateral development investment can also facilitate the pandemic relief. The latter might be both important for the sustainable development and economic recoveries in the global North and South.

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COVID-19-Unexpected Shocks for Migrant Workers and Students

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The unprecedented pandemic brought about by COVID-19 has entailed enormous loss of human lives and virtually crippled economies worldwide. Economic activities have been halted partially or fully, disrupted all industries. The disastrous pandemic has resulted in massive erosion of jobs and livelihoods. If this catastrophe continues for some more months, the losses both in terms human lives and economic activities will be enormous. Economies whose dependence on informal economy is huge, overwhelmingly large workforce becomes the first victim of upheaval both in terms of human lives and economic activities. This is palpably being evident in India and elsewhere. Obviously, the discussion on lives or livelihoods is a stupid and myopic debate. Clearly, this is a non-binary issue as both have symbiotic and circular relationship.

It is estimated that over 91 million of these lost their employment in April 2020 and most hard hit among them are the informal and unorganized sector workers. The unemployment rate was at 27.1% in the week ending on May 3 and one in four employed lost job across India in March-April (Vyas, 2020).

Exports have fallen sharply over 35% during March alone (*Business Standard*, 2020). Gross Domestic Product is likely to fall drastically to and register of 1.9 percent in 2020 as per IMF (*Press Trust of India*, 2020). Some economists have projected negative growth rate in the first quarter of 2020-21 (Rangarajan, 2020). The gradual opening economy after 3.0 lockdown is

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regarded a highly welcome move. However, full scale opening of the economy may not be possible in the current situation hence huge losses of revenues for the governments is imminent and inescapable. The situation is likely to worsen in terms of job losses, incomes squeeze, hunger and destitution. Some suggest that since India's Debt-GDP ratio is lower (around 69%) compared to other countries and that provides enough fiscal space for financing the economy in such a difficult time.

Along with increased borrowing and the *fiscal deficit* can help boost a sluggish economy by pumping more money into the hands of people and supporting economic activities across sectors. The dilemma was clear before governments on how to stop the *outbreak* of the coronavirus on the one hand and restart the economic activities on the other. Clearly, a fine balance has been attempted by the governments despite the fears of spread of disease. In any case, this disease is likely to stay for some more time and therefore business activities can no longer be put off indefinitely and people need to learn gradually to live with it.

The sections below describe how COVID-19 induced nationwide pandemic has impacted the lives and livelihoods of the migrant workers and of the students in schools and colleges.

Impact on Migrant Workers

The most vulnerable lot of workers are in the informal economy constituting about 217 million (non-farm) out of 465 million workforce. It was estimated that 60 to 65 million are vulnerable migrants, including periodic and seasonal migrants, in the informal economy. A large chunk of these vulnerable workers is engaged in numerous petty activities such as cart pullers, bicycle peddlers, rickshaw pullers, domestic workers, casual workers in construction, home-based women workers, street vendors, and workers in small business establishments. A huge chunk of

floating population come from poorer states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal who sprung up temporarily in big cities and metro towns in a bid to earning livelihoods.

The ongoing pandemic has brought about enormous plight to the migrant workers as evident that thousands of migrant workers stuck in big cities who flocked from these states. The images of such a huge stranded influx of migrant workers faced with untold miseries that was manifested around the railway stations, bus stands and on the roads, who desperately wanted to go home. The forceful confinement of migrant workers was considered no longer a solution and the pressure was rightly mounting to liberate them. This was the moment of emotional bonding to kith and kin to their native places. Government took right step to send them back to their respective places and placate the situation. However, the decision to unbound them remains a challenge when economy is progressively being opened and need workers to resume manufacturing activities, running shops and establishments, construction activities, other production facilities and alike activities. These sectors of economy are likely to face huge shortage of manpower.

A palpable sense of double loss is imminently clear for migrants, losing the jobs in urban market on the one hand and no income and job opportunity in their native place on the other, thereby escalating their poverty, hunger and deprivation further. Many would likely fall well below the poverty line among the previously counted non-poor. This has serious implications on them and those depending on the main bread winners. This poses new challenges towards mitigation of the hardship of migrant workers. Clearly, there is an urgent need for developing strategies to lessen the vulnerabilities. Some possible short, medium- and long-term strategies stand out clearly to alleviate their miseries.

As part of short-term measures, the following action points emerge clearly:

- (i) Mahatma Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) should be expanded both in terms of budgetary allocation and days of employment. Some of the additional activities could be considered in its ambit to have wider coverage of activities. Wages needs to be increased to Rs. 225 to Rs. 250 or increase by 25% to existing wages. This is the easiest way to ease their distress and sufferings.
- (ii) Since most of the migrants belong to bottom income ladder of society, therefore, food security is paramount importance to ward off hunger and destitution. The free ration or highly subsidized ration for next three to six months be ensured to their family. Additionally, provision of doling out some cash should be made in case there is no job provided under MGNREGA or some alternative job opportunity arises.

Medium- and long-term measures essentially need to consider the following aspects:

Most of the informal sector workers are still deprived of social security network even though Government of India has enacted the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act 2008 that recommends formulation of social security schemes such as life and disability cover, health and maternity benefits, old age protection and other benefits. There is an urgent need to expand the network of social protection floors to ensure access to essential social security benefits with adequate portability entitlements.

Universal basic income should be implemented ensuring basic income guarantee, allowing financial freedom and

alleviating from the poverty. This would be an important move in such a national disaster situation where poor people are prone to fall in to poverty trap and destitution.

Typically, movements of people from poorer regions to relatively non-poor regions take place primarily because of the unequal development across regions. Clearly, there is an urgent need to fill the regional development gaps and provide better opportunities in such lagging regions to ward off distresses from of out-migration.

Impact on Education

The pandemic has far reaching effects not only lives and livelihoods, particularly floating population and poor but also to every walk of life.

The education sector (primary secondary and tertiary sector) is critical for human capital formation. Education has enormous spill over beneficial effects to the society and industry and education, in particular secondary education is viewed as a means of improving skills required by jobs thrown up in the labour market. The education sector has also hit badly during pandemic. Students are struck at homes during long lock down period and without adequate mentoring, counselling and online provisioning of education, serious concerns are expressed to have long term adverse impacts on emotional, psychological, behavioral patterns on the student's community.

The students in higher education system are likely to enter the labour market or pursue further studies is the most critical factor for human capital and creating ideas and inventive capacity. The lock down has huge impact on higher education system both in terms of continuing education and research, disconnect from supervision and uncertainty of conducting examination and entering labour market or pursuing further education and research.

Already, there is huge disconnect between the demand and supply sides or what is being produced by educational and training institutions and what is being demanded in the different sectors of economy will further accentuate the serious distortion in the labour market.

Serious question arises how to engage students' community with university and its regulatory body and with that of ministry/ department which support these institutions. There is already huge disjoint among these entities and there are obvious emerging challenges in the higher education in the pandemic situation. Our higher education system is not geared to adapt new challenges that clearly shows lack of preparedness and response system. One of the fundamental reasons is lack of reforms that is pulling down the higher education system.

Some of the action points taken by China during lockdown period is worth considering with some modification as per the specific needs and requirements (Xu, 2020).

- i. Rapid adoption of online teaching and learning
- ii. Providing free advanced internet (with fiber optic and a 4G network) and setting up cloud-based education platform.
- iii. Online teaching and learning platforms developed by universities and local education authorities.
- iv. Delivering teaching via remote models and sensitizing very demanding parents and students.
- v. Coordinating the adaptation of resources to their local needs and coordinate with delivery system.
- vi. Optimum utilization of distance learning resources and crowdsourcing from the best teachers.

Conclusion

Pandemic is likely to stay some more times and we need to live with it. Clearly, there is no ‘either- or’ scenario between lives and livelihoods both must go together in such difficult and uncertain times. Pandemic has impacted nearly all the economic activities and the informal sector and daily wage, and migrant workers are most severely hit. There is greater need for focusing on the key challenges and risks that these vulnerable lot are faced with. Pandemic has significantly disrupted the higher education sector and needs preparedness and response system. Obviously, there is a need for evolving sector specific policies and strategies toward rebuilding an economy ravaged by the pandemic.

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COVID-19 and Digital Inclusion

Soumya Bhowmick¹ and Vani Kaushik²

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our economic and social lives in a multitude of ways. On one hand, the uncertainty around the duration of this pandemic has brought the world to a pause, while, on the other hand, it has caused an uptick in the digital space. Like all countries across the globe including India, the implementation of strict lockdowns has restricted the movement of people. This ensued in the increased usage of the virtual space that has spurred the process of India transition into a digital economy. Online platforms are being increasingly used for practices ranging from telemedicine to online education to minimize the disruption in the usual way of life. Consequently, the demand for video-conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, Webex, etc. has also intensified. As we are proceeding towards a global economic downturn, which is likely to have a huge impact on returns of the companies and jobs. However, there are arrangements being made by the employers and other stakeholders across the work towards work from home or online to retain the employment and other activities such as education and training.

However, when it comes to reaping the benefits of the virtual space, there are concerns that certain categories of people may be at a disadvantage due to their inability to harness the potential of the internet during the pandemic and in the post-COVID-19. Digital divide, which mostly revolves around the

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availability and access to digital technology, is a compelling concern at the global level as well as in the Indian scenario. 52% of the world’s population does not have access to the internet. Additionally, the chasm also exists in the quality of internet – South Korea’s average broadband speed is at 28.6 Mbps in comparison to Nigeria’s meager 1.5 Mbps (Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, 2017).

As India embarked upon the transformation process towards a '\$5 trillion economy', its digital literacy stood at a mere 10% (Srivastava, 2019). Many services, including essential services, are now available online, thereby increasing the inequality which arises due to lack of access to the internet and digital illiteracy. The Inclusive Internet Index (2020) provides a rigorous evaluation of the operational status of the internet in 100 nations across the world, covering 91% of the world's population. It captures the four crucial categories of inclusivity - availability, affordability, relevance, and readiness. The Indian scores (all scores are out of 100) in comparison to the other South Asian economies covered are depicted in the Table 1 below. Although India ranks as the best performer in the regional category, it secures the disappointing 46th rank on the global scale.

Table 1: India’s Digital Index Score and Rank

Country	Global Score and (Rank)	Availability Score and (Rank)	Affordability Score and (Rank)	Relevance Score and (Rank)	Readiness Score and (Rank)
India	71.1 (46 th)	57 (68 th)	82.7 (18 th)	80.8 (46 th)	78.9 (12 th)
Sri Lanka	66.7 (56 th)	62 (60 th)	62.7 (60 th)	85.7 (25 th)	59.2 (71 st)
Bangladesh	58.4 (70 th)	53.9 (72 nd)	61.6 (65 th)	61.4 (72 nd)	60.5 (65 th)
Pakistan	55.1 (76 th)	42.3 (86 th)	63.9 (57 th)	64 (71 st)	61.9 (64 th)

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit

Albeit, India has the second-largest number of internet subscribers in the world, and the total number has reached 687.62 million by

2019 (Lohchab, 2020), a study conducted during the nation-wide lockdown on March 25, 2020 shows only 38% of Indians are connected to the internet either via smartphones or other devices (Schumacher and Kent, 2020). Further, in 2019, there was 51% of internet penetration in urban areas, as opposed to 27% in rural areas. However, as of November 2019, for the first time the number of internet users in rural areas, that is 227 million exceeded that in urban areas, that is 205 million (Mishra and Chanchani, 2020).

The subsequent sections analyze how the technological advancement processes are not socially inclusive for India across economic classes, gender, and age cohorts.

Economic Classes

There is no doubt that the coronavirus disaster has differential impact on different economic classes. Despite concerted efforts towards ameliorating income inequalities across and within nations, the pandemic is bound to widen the gap even more. In India, 51% of those who have higher income use the internet, as against 27% people belonging to the lower income category (Schumacher and Kent, 2020). The financial income of a person is also one of the primary factors which affect an individual's ability to access the hardware and software related to information technology, which facilitates the connectivity to the internet. The aspect of digital literacy is also closely linked with financial capability since digital skilling is an expensive process for less-developed nations such as India. Given the fact that a large proportion of the Indian population is not economically well-off, they resort to using smartphones for connecting to the internet (Neilsen, 2020). In addition, they are not able to purchase laptop or computer.

India is ranked last in terms of the percentage of the population owning a smartphone - which stands at a paltry 32%,

much lower than the median score of 70%, in a study across 34 countries (Schumacher and Kent, 2020). In fact, a basic mobile phone is owned by 35% of the people, and 32% do not even own a mobile phone. The difference between advanced economies and emerging economies is also evident here, as the percentage of the population owning a smartphone is as high as 97% in South Korea, 81% in the United States (US), and 79% in Germany.

Gender

Other conflicts and disasters through recent history such as the 2014 Ebola outbreak and the 2015 Zika Virus, led to gender inequality with women being disproportionately affected in dimension ranging from reproductive and menstrual health to access to basic education (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The coronavirus pandemic too will have its share of gendered consequences, especially in the domain of digital workspaces. According to the Global Gender Gap Index, India has a grossly substandard rank of 112 (out of 153 countries), with a low score of 0.668 out of 1 (World Economic Forum, 2020). The existing gender divides in the technological space in terms of purchasing power, usage autonomy, and digital skill will pose major problems for countries like India with low gender equality (Sengupta, 2019).

The percentage of adult men who use social media is 28%, as against 11% of women in India. The situation is reversed in advanced economies such as Australia, Sweden, Spain, US and Poland where the percentage of women who access social media exceeds that of men (Poushter, 2018). This is indicative of a clear gender divide about internet usage and connectivity. The disparity between internet users is even starker in rural India, where only 31% women have access to the internet compared to 69% men. However, there were 26 million new female internet users till November 2019, which indicates a 21% increase, as compared to

the 9% increase in male internet users (Nielsen, 2020; Mishra and Chanchani, 2020).

Age Cohorts

The coronavirus has not only left the aged population vulnerable in terms of fatality but also in the realm of livelihood. Hence, age is an important factor that needs to be considered while assessing the transition to digital platforms for work. It is observed that the substantially older population is not so adept with digital devices due to a lag in technological skilling and exposure in the previous decades. In India, 57% of those between the age group of 18-29 years, 35% of those between 30-49 years, and 18% of those aged 50 and above use the internet (Schumacher and Kent, 2020). Thus, India depicts a clear digital divide in its working age population, where younger people are more likely to operate the internet.

The usage of social media also varies across age categories with 49% of those aged between 18-29 years, 29% of those aged between 30-49 years, 11% aged 50 and above use social media (Schumacher and Kent, 2020) – clearly hinting at the age factor in India’s tech-savvy population. This is also indicative of the fact that the older population is at a severe disadvantage as compared to the younger workforce when it comes to participating in the digital workspace.

Industrial and Societal Challenges

The pandemic induced digitization of the economy is bound to create inequality in terms of access, jobs, wages, unemployment, amongst others. While there will be job losses between the range of 2 million to 2 billion due to digitization of processes, it has also been estimated that digitization would create approximately 6 million jobs across the globe from 2016-2025 (World Economic Forum, 2016). The consumer services industry will face the

highest number of job losses, followed by aviation, mining, and oil and gas industry. On the other hand, the electricity sector will create the most significant number of jobs, which is followed by the telecom sector. The digitally unskilled workforce will be the worst affected, as automated machines would replace most of their services. The government has the onus to ensure that the progress towards a digital economy does not enhance the existing income inequalities in the country by taking affirmative action to increase the digital literacy of the workforce.

In India, the Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna is in force, wherein employees (who have completed two years of insurable employment) covered under the Employees State Insurance (ESI) Act, 1948 are entitled to cash compensation for 90 days, once in their lifetime, after they have at least been unemployed for three months (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2019). The Indian government has taken a step in the right direction, by planning to extend the unemployment insurance to employees from the organized sector who may lose their jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, this move is not hailed as positive by many who suggest that the restrictive coverage of the ESI Act only covers about 2% of India's workforce, therefore excluding a majority of the workers from its ambit. It has been suggested that a blanket unemployment scheme be implemented in the country to adequately deal with the job losses expected to happen due to the COVID-19 crisis (Jha, 2020).

Conclusion

COVID-19 has pushed society towards becoming incredibly digitally reliant. However, it brings to fore the stark gaps that exist in terms of being a part of the digital workspace. Given this apparent inequality, it will also have a detrimental effect on the various UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as SDG

1 (No Poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), amongst others.

The digital divide is exacerbating the pre-existing socio-economic exclusions in society. At this juncture, it becomes imperative to ensure that those who do not have access to the digital environment are not further left behind in digital transformation in the post-COVID-19 world. The expansion of the Digital Initiative of Government of India can be potent mechanism for this purpose.

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Reimagining Public Spaces: Adapting to a New Reality

Laura v. Puttkamer¹

In spring 2020, COVID-19 is everywhere. Its impact on countless aspects of our everyday life are slowly becoming clear. For urban planners, the question is how to adapt cities in the future so that they will be more resilient towards health crises like pandemics. Some drastic changes in urban fabrics all over the world are already visible: People are biking much more, walking on the streets to maintain social distancing, working from home and not using public spaces as much as they used to. This article uses the theory of first, second and third places to understand what the crisis means for our cities. Towards the end, it provides some recommendations about our new reality.

The Notion of Public Space

Sociologist Ray Oldenburg coined the term “third places” in 1989, meaning public spaces that are crucial for neighbourhoods as a space to interact, to gather, to meet and to talk (Oldenburg, 1989). According to Oldenburg, these three different spaces can be discerned:

“First place: Home; Second place: Work; Third place: Public spaces, such as libraries, parks, and social spaces” (Oldenburg, 1989).

Oldenburg identifies these places as “the public places on neutral ground where people can gather and interact. In contrast to first and second places, third places allow people to put aside their concerns and simply enjoy the company and conversation

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around them” (Oldenburg, 2000). In recent years, urban planning has focused on providing liveable third places or public spaces. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS, 2020) has been on the forefront of this effort. However, the COVID-19 crisis is changing many aspects of public spaces. Suddenly, most of us are at home most of the time, are discouraged from using public space or only using it with a safe distance.

The First Place as a Combination of All Spaces

Our first place, home, is suddenly a combination of all spaces during the worldwide lockdowns. This can be fatal for people who suffer from domestic violence, for example. It is also a big challenge for parents or persons taking care of elderly or sick relatives. As working from home is a new reality for many, at least for the foreseeable future, improved home office design and new labour laws will become big challenge for architects, planners, and policymakers (*The Economist*, 2020).

But some daily tasks cannot be done from home, especially in countries with higher poverty rates and informal labour. That means that crucial services should be available within walking distances to people’s first place, so that they can satisfy their needs even during a pandemic. Dense cities with many local centres, corner shops and similar facilities in a mixed-use design allow citizens to easily meet their basic needs even during a quarantine (World Bank, 2020).

Current developments show that priorities in public spaces are shifting: biking, access to green and blue spaces as well as the possibility to visit national parks are important to keep spirits up and allow people to go outside while maintain social distancing rules (C40, 2020). Here, urban planners and policymakers need to provide adequate upgrades to urban infrastructure and public spaces that should be implementable quickly and, if necessary, repetitively. Particularly for dense

cities, this is a challenge. The provision of public space that can function even during a crisis is something to be taken into consideration even once COVID-19 is over.



(The above picture shows social distancing being practiced in India during the nationwide lockdown. Photo courtesy: *DNA India*)

The Virtual Third Place

As more and more citizens in lockdown take to online games and celebrations, it seems possible to imagine a virtual third place. While socialising and community-building is not the same in front of a screen, we are still able to use third places for community-building, as intended by Oldenburg, the Project for Public Spaces and other experts (Planetizen, 2019). However, the elderly and people without internet access will find it difficult to join these virtual third places, which is something to be worked on.

Now that some countries are lifting the strict lockdown rules, people flock to public spaces more than ever. They need to live their inherent urge to socialize, observe others and get out of the house for a while - the house that has become a combination of all places. While it seems that the trend to ‘work from home’ is

there to stay in many cases, you cannot take away the physical third place from people. Its importance is becoming very clear during these challenging times (Project for Public Spaces, 2020).

For urban planners, this means that we must think of new and creative ways to enable community-building (The Creation of Place Design Team, n.y.). We need larger public spaces that make social distancing possible. We need accessible, attractive infrastructure that allows everyone to use public spaces. The following viral image from a market in Myanmar is a good first example:



(Photo courtesy: Chan Myae Aung)

Can a Fourth Place be the Solution?

Economic geographer Arnault Morisson argued in 2018 that our evolving economies are calling for a fourth place. The current crisis invites us to re-consider this idea, since the separation between the different places is more blurred than ever. New social environments such as co-living (first place + second place), co-working (second place + third place) and comingling (first place + third place) have been on the rise in recent years already

(Morisson, 2018). Now that all our places are combined in the first place – i.e., we are living, working and socialising at home, and therefore, we need to rethink our distribution of place to make it resilient to extraordinary circumstances like a pandemic.

Fourth places, according to Morisson, could look like huge innovation centres that combine all three places in one. They are so big that they would even allow for social distancing, while still living, working, and socialising in the same space. But fourth places can also look like they already do for many of us – virtual and with blurred frontiers. Policymakers and urban planners should favour the creation of fourth places and innovative public spaces to incorporate different dimensions of place and to adapt to circumstances quickly.

While not all the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic are clear yet, it is important to already think about how current events are shaping our social and public life in the months and years to come. This might mean implementing measures specific to regional context, such as building more cycling lanes, providing more parks or focusing on innovative fourth places, but it also means rethinking the role of public space and the city as a social construct. The goal should be to allow for public life and community-building to continue safely - and a city that is able to adapt its public spaces as and where necessary. This readiness to adjust with prevailing circumstances will be the most successful.

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Work Life of the Youth in the Times of COVID-19:***Perplexed State of Mind, Especially for Young Indian Women***Ritika Gupta¹ and Anshula Mehta²**Backdrop**

India being the second most populous country and fastest growing major developing economy of the world is in the phase of “demographic dividend”. India can exploit its potential and contribute more to the economic growth harnessing its young labour force. According to Census 2011, more than half of the youth population (aged 15-29) is under working and about a quarter of the population is absorbed by youth in labour market. Every year, 10 million of the youth add to the labour force, expanding the bulge of unemployed youth (Sharma and Mehta, 2017).

According to Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18, the youths in India share nearly 28% of the total population. The worker participation rate for the youth in urban areas is 31.4%. The unemployment rate among the urban male youth was 18.7% while for urban female youth was 27.2%. The main challenges that the youth face while they enter the labour market are: jobs that do not match their education, outdated skills that do not address the labour demand, and a lack of knowledge on where and how to look for jobs (PLFS, 2018).

Moreover, the sectoral composition shows that there is a gradual shift from agricultural sector and manufacturing sector to non-manufacturing and services sector. Although service sector employment has increased, non-manufacturing sector jobs did not

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grow much to compensate the employment fall in both agriculture and manufacturing. The rural-urban migration among youth is highest among the males who dream of a high paying job, good quality of education and in turn good quality of life. But they end up in the despair migration crisis amidst slow supply of such opportunities. The gig economy is the silver lining while dealing with mass unemployment in the country. However, labour market in gig economy is characterized by no or low security benefits, no regular wages or full-time jobs, thus they have low savings.

The Gender Divide

Youth unemployment in India is also characterized by “gender divide”. The work participation rate in general for males is around three-fifth whereas for females it is one-fifth. The youth unemployment rate for females and males who are graduate and above is 47.7% and 29.7% respectively. This vast difference shows that the Indian labour market is not only failing at creating adequate jobs but also depicting its favouritism towards males.

Educated youth female unemployment (graduate and above) is the highest in the backward and north-eastern states. But the difference is also visible in the most forward states such as Kerala and Goa. The following figure shows that the unemployment rates among women is almost double in some states as compared with all India average and greater than their counterpart.

Social and Psychological Facets

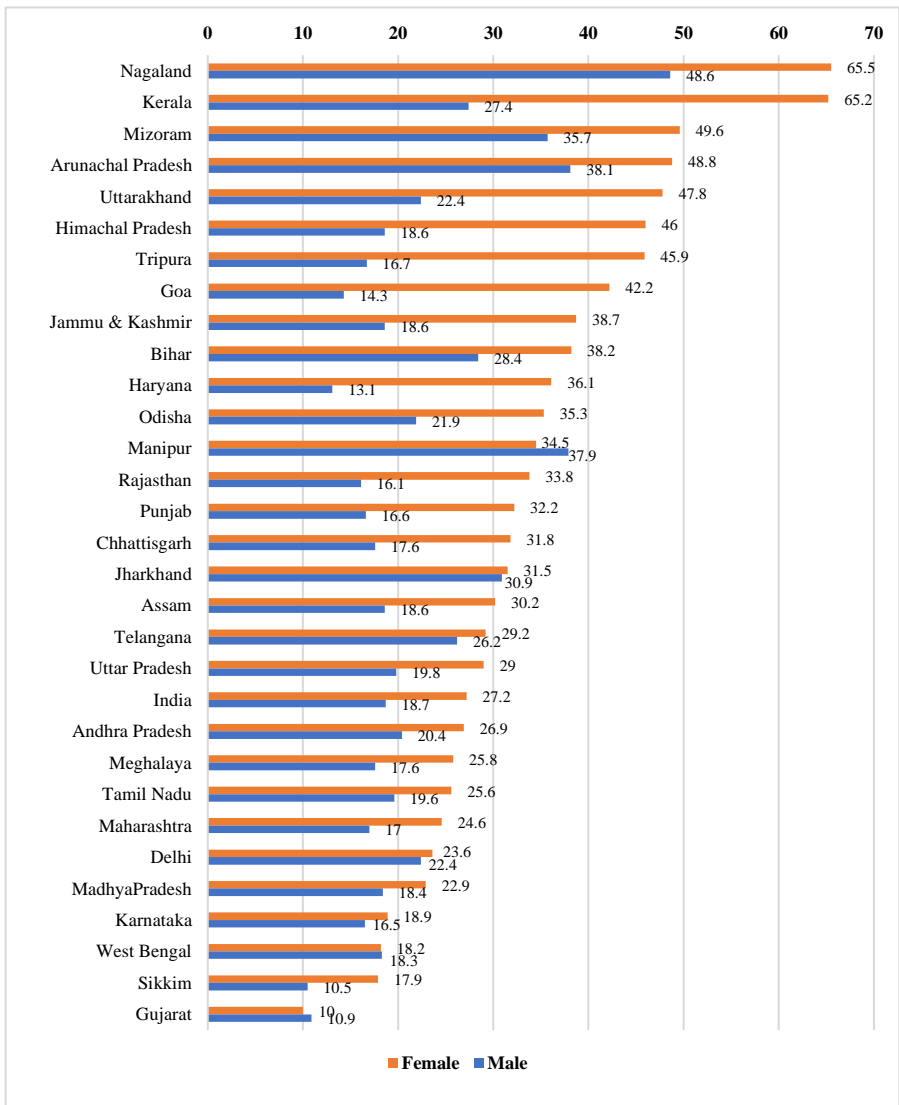
In recent decades, there have been significant achievements in terms of educational attainment, both in school (almost universal attainment) and higher education (more than one-third enrolment) especially for girls. According to Report on Youth Employment and Unemployment Scenario by Labour Bureau 2015-16, 38.4%

of those who are graduate and above are unemployed in the country. The other problem is that when the youth attains a high degree of education, his/her aspirations for higher paying jobs increases and non-availability of jobs matching these aspirations leads to high educated unemployment, especially in urban areas.

Youth are more grossed in the work-study choice dilemma coupled with limited opportunities and ever-expanding competition, which result in a perplexed state of mind. The mental stress of aspiring to secure a permanent employment (often in the government), getting a good paying job and attaining higher education often results in underemployment and unemployment.

The cultural factors which contribute to low labour participation rates for young women include denial from the families, no access and affordability for higher education, expectations of being a homemaker and fear of sexual harassment, etc. Even the most elite and educated societies of the country are held by patriarchy and despise females stepping outside for work. Youth is considered to be a prime age for maternity phase; thus, they relinquish their work after bearing children.

Figure 1: Gender-wise unemployment rates for the youth (15-29) in urban areas



Source: PLFS 2017-18

Challenges and Opportunities

Youth employment in India is a paradoxical situation. Despite many vacancies reported online by various job portals, the unemployment prevails. The main reasons for this contradictory situation are institutional failure, ill-organized labour market, the mismatch between the skills demanded by the employer and what the candidate possesses, etc. There has been an apparent shift in demand towards specialized high-end technical skills (e.g. artificial intelligence, automation, cloud technology, Internet of Things) and soft skill sets (e.g. analytical and problem-solving, interpersonal, communication and ability to work in teams). The sectors in which demand for jobs has increased are information technology, e-commerce, financial technology, health care, logistics and the automotive industry. According to PLFS, only 4.4% persons have received technical trainingⁱ among youth workforce. The challenge which youth face is demand driven employment and supply driven education due to lack of interface between industry and educational institutions.

The current government has come out with various schemes to make Indian youth *Atma Nirbhar* (self-reliant). The various flagship programmes such as Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme and Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana aim at providing subsidized loans for establishing the manufacturing and service units. To promote employment generation, government came up with Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Protsahan Yojana under which it is paying the entire amount towards EPF and EPS for all eligible new employees for all sectors for 3 years. Other schemes include Start Up India, Stand Up India and Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana.

The types of jobs available to young people are more heterogeneous and unstable. Thus, there is a need for a scheme which provides assured employment in the urban areas. The employers need to expand the apprenticeship and internship

programmes focusing more on developing the technical skills. The educational institutes should develop the curriculum as per the requirements of the industry to efficiently tap the demographic dividend. There is a need for shifting the burden of employment from service sector to other economic activities such as manufacturing and non-manufacturing sectors of the country.

COVID-19 and Youth at Work

According to the report of CMIE, 27 million of the youth (age group 20-23 years) have lost their jobs because of the pandemic. Due to nationwide lockdown, the halt in the economic activities and mobility hindered the economic activities, thus, to cut out the expenses, employers' resort to layoffs. Youth bear the brunt and are rendered jobless in the times of crisis. This has resulted in lost earnings, greater costs and slower economic recovery in future.

Understandably, the young Indians, especially the women are facing the multiple burnt of the Coronavirus pandemic. The dimension of higher education, limited opportunities, and now the restrictive mobility post the pandemic, have led to the most troublesome situation for the youth. The challenges and evolving scenario are compounding the already burdened youth with worry. Nonetheless, provided with the right direction and support ecosystem, the resilient and aspirational young Indians will be the front soldiers against the fight against coronavirus pandemic. Empowered young Indians can lead us towards the vision of New India and make our great nation “*Vishwa-Guru*”.

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ⁱ Aerospace and aviation, agriculture, non-crop based agriculture, food processing, allied manufacturing- gems and jewellery, leather, rubber, furniture and fittings, printing , artisan/ craftsman/ handicraft/ creative arts and cottage based production, automotive, beauty and wellness, chemical engineering, hydrocarbons, chemicals and petrochemicals, civil engineering-construction, plumbing, paints and coatings, electrical, power and electronics, healthcare and life sciences, hospitality and tourism, iron and steel, mining, earthmoving and infra building, Information Technology (IT) and IT-enabled services (ITeS), logistics, mechanical engineering-capital goods, strategic manufacturing, media-journalism, mass communication and entertainment, office and business related work, security, telecom, textiles and handlooms, apparels, work related to childcare, nutrition, pre-school and crèche, etc.

UN World Water Report 2020: Water and Climate Change Report Review

Debojyoti Das¹

The spread of the novel coronavirus disease as a global pandemic has been a detractor in the past few months, it is important that we do not lose our focus on climate change and its long-term impacts on our environment. The World Water Report 2020 makes a very important connection between water and climate change impact on society and economy at large. It demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between water and climate, recognizing the fact that we must move beyond technically focussing on the hydrological cycle. Bridging the gap in knowledge production between hard and soft sciences, policy and practice, people's cultural attitudes and social practices and more important recognizing slew of measures that needs to be in place to tackle the problem of climate change. Water is essential to human life and livelihood but it is severely strained and unequally distributed because of human action and the caprices of weather pattern triggered by climate change events such as el Niño, forest fires, drought and deluge that are becoming common across the globe affecting poor and rich nations alike.

The report highlights the actions that can be taken collectively by engaging with a variety of stakeholders, institutions, government and citizens using new technologies, knowledge of water use and institutional measures that would guide policy and practice. The report focuses on linkage of water to multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These include those related to zero hunger (SDG 2), availability and access to water (SDG 6), climate action (SDG 13), and promoting the sustainable use of ecosystem services (SDG 15). Sustainable

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use and distribution of water is closely interlinked with these SDGs. How to achieve this is a trick question that governments, policymakers, scientists, need to explore based on past experiences and future roadmaps developed in the report. The report encapsulates a variety of measures that have been implemented in different parts of the globe and their effectiveness in sustainable use of water that could help in reducing the challenges of climate change.

Within its 230 pages, the report crosses over fourteen chapters focusing on the challenges, opportunities and potential responses to climate change – in terms of adaptation, mitigation and improved resilience – that can be addressed through improving how water resources are managed and used, while providing water supply and sanitation services for all in a sustainable manner. In doing so, the report tackles two of the most critical crises the world will continue facing over the next several decades: ‘Water (in)security’ and ‘climate change’. The first challenge discussed in the report is an obvious and most fundamental one- availability of water.

As the report suggests, “Global water use has increased by a factor of six over the past 100 years and continues to grow steadily at a rate of about 1% per year as a result of increasing population, economic development and shifting consumption patterns. Combined with a more erratic and uncertain supply, climate change will aggravate the situation of currently water-stressed regions and generate water stress in regions where water resources are still abundant today” (p. 14).

Therefore, it is imperative that we bring significant changes to our lives and ways of using water resources. One way of doing this in farmlands is to adopt innovation that have links to grassroots movements. For example, in India the popularization of Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) among smallholders is a major shift in agrarian policy in the past six decades from water intensive Green Revolution technologies that has ensured

sustainable water use in parched semi-arid landscapes of central India and brought higher income to smallholders who can save on overheads: fertilizers, irrigated water and pesticides. Similar experiences are shared based on organic vermin culture in China and Africa, strategies that are close to local people's culture and knowledge systems. The way forward is Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA). It is a recognized suite of well-informed approaches to land and water management, soil conservation and agronomic practice that sequester carbon and reduce Green House Gas (GHG) emissions. CSA practices help to retain soil structure, organic matter and moisture under drier conditions, and include agronomic techniques (including irrigation and drainage) to adjust or extend cropping calendars to adapt to seasonal and inter-annual climate shifts.

Water is not directly mentioned in the Paris Agreement, but its centrality in sustainability issues cannot be underestimated. Therefore, the report focus on the interfaces water has with other SDGs that are linked with health, hygiene and sanitation. Water also features prominently in disaster risk reduction (DRR) literature. The range of available climate change adaptation and DRR strategies includes hard (structural) and soft (policy instruments) approaches. It includes addressing social issues such as mainstreaming gender concerns within water policy framework not just as a lip service but to effectively engage with the challenges faced by women particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and other parched areas of the globe.

The report calls for a nexus approach developed by a consortium of academics from the United Kingdom to deal with climate change challenges. The nexus approach is a new philosophy that deals with the interaction of various factors leading to climate change mitigation. For example, the use of photovoltaic cells to transfer water for irrigation through precision farming that increases the efficiency of water use and at the same time reduces the burden on conventional energy consumption.

One of the ways in which the report focuses on grassroots involvement is through the promotion of citizen science that will come to aid expert knowledge on water resource management such as flood proofing. As the report suggests, “Citizen science and crowdsourcing have the potential to contribute to early warning systems and to provide data for validating flood forecasting models” (p. 20).

According to the report, the way forward is to have equitable, participatory, multi-stakeholder approach to water governance in the context of climate change. In South Asia for example, countries like Bangladesh where arsenic pollution is a major problem for the poor to access safe drinking water, community based organizations like *Nijer Kori* have evolved *Sahoj* forms of agriculture that are based on community initiative co-operative farms that focus on food sovereignty rather than food surplus for the market. In this way, community-based initiatives can secure water of villages and their aquifers. Correspondingly, a project launched by UK universities funded by Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF) called the South Asia Nitrogen Hub focuses on reducing the nitrogen load on South Asia’s agriculture. This would mean moving away from water intensive farming and reinventing new techniques and methods of sustainable farming across South Asia fostering learning from each other’s experience.

The need for greater cooperation between the water and climate communities exists beyond the realm of scientific research. On the one hand, it is imperative that the climate change community, and climate negotiators give greater attention to the role of water and recognize its central importance in addressing the climate change crisis. On the other hand, it is essential that the water community focuses its efforts to promote the importance of water in terms of both adaptation and mitigation, developing concrete water-related project proposals for inclusion in nationally determined contributions (NDCs), and strengthen the

means and capacities to plan, implement and monitor water-related activities in NDCs.

The report has gone a long way in shifting its focus from governments to civil society and community involvement in water resource management supported by institutions and policy frameworks that are collaborative, bottom-up, gender sensitive, stakeholder-based and participatory. Yet there is a lack of conviviality when we look at questions of knowledge production for the management of water resources. There is also deficiency of care for the environment. Experts still call the shots at policy board rooms and during the planning and implementation phases of technologies and programmes. Local stakeholders join to build consensus. Empowerment is enshrined as a principle that gets its merit from the top administration. The communities who live on parched landscapes are still at the margins of decision making. I am buoyant that the next report will reflect on these concerns and take local knowledge of the community more seriously by acknowledging the plurality of ideas in knowledge production while finding solutions for climate change.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further raised alarm bells to the impending crises that global warming can pose to our environment and water resources. The lock down during the pandemic has been disadvantageous for the global economy and financial markets but it has been liberation for the global environment with less polluted water bodies and clean drinking water that humanity has long wished for. This report does propose a series of practical responses, in terms of policy, financing sustainable water use and practical community based action on the ground, to support both regional and transnational objectives and individual aspirations to achieve a sustainable and prosperous world for all.

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Special Issue: *The COVID-19 Pandemic and India*

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