

# Agriculture, Gender, and COVID-19: Impact and Recovery



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## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds, its impacts on women's welfare, food and livelihood security are becoming increasingly clear. The pandemic and its concomitant lockdowns have disrupted livelihoods and value chains in rural and urban areas. Research by sector experts from organizations like International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), World Bank and Centre for Global Development, highlight the differential impacts of the pandemic on men and women and their ability to cope with these multiple shocks. For instance, women tend to experience more lingering income shocks and have greater difficulty accessing food than men. Furthermore, the pandemic is increasing the work burden on women due to school closures and the additional care needs of sick family household members.

This special issue of *Southasiadisasters.net* is titled 'Agriculture, Gender and COVID-19: Impact and Recovery' and highlights how the food and livelihood security of women (especially those engaged in agriculture and allied livelihoods) have been affected by the pandemic. This issue draws principally from the research project between IFPRI and Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, wherein a detailed phone surveys were conducted with women from seven districts of Gujarat to understand the extent of the adverse impact of the pandemic on their lives.

Evidence that has emerged from the field suggests not only are women's food and livelihood security being affected by the pandemic, their vulnerability to mental health problems and gender-based violence has also increased. The insights highlighted in this issue can help decision makers to mitigate some of the negative impacts of the pandemic on women by designing and implementing appropriate policies and programs. ■

- Kshitij Gupta, AIDMI, India

## PREFACE

# Agriculture, Gender and COVID-19: Impact and Recovery

By Dr. Claudia Ringler, Deputy Director, Environment and Production Technology Division, CGIAR, IFPRI, USA

I am honored to write the preface for the Southasiadisasters.net issue on "Agriculture, Gender and COVID-19: Impact and Recovery". I started to engage with Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in 2019 on a research-for-development project that was squarely focused on reaching women farmers with climate resilience strategies. We felt at that time that this was one of the most under-studied topics that was essential to rural women's future in South Asia and elsewhere. I had no idea that the journey would lead to eventually trying to address key questions on the twin crises of climate change and COVID-19.

With lockdowns and mobility constraints affecting our research and field activities we were able to collect five rounds of phone survey data that described the changing impacts of the pandemic not only on rural women farmers but also street vendors, casual laborers and home-based workers in Gujarat, India. The impacts were profound and already in June 2020 it was clear that they would be lasting—due to observed

and experienced losses of income and associated depletion of savings, borrowing from wherever it was feasible, selling of assets, and foregone expenditures on more varied and higher-quality foods and health. In some cases, women's savings were used first, and women more often skipped meals and experienced food insecurity. These are realities that already emerged in mid-to late 2020 and realities that cannot be reversed easily. Many of these COVID-19 impacts will be felt across generations, particularly the reduced quantity and quality of foods consumed as well as the lack of access to education of South Asian children, and most acutely of poor children. And all of these impacts were apparent before COVID-19 health impacts and associated human and economic costs of morbidity and mortality gendered much deeper and larger adverse impacts for much of South Asia in early 2021.

The issue focuses on gender and agriculture. Early evidence suggests that rural households were better protected from the adverse impacts



Photo credit: Sumit Saraswat.

of COVID-19—but were more exposed to the parallel ongoing impacts of climate extreme events, such as floods and droughts. In fact, millions of rural casual laborers who immediately lost their jobs in March and April of 2020 were forced to return to rural areas to survive on locally produced foods. But agricultural value chains were also interrupted—starting from key sources of food offtake, such as wet markets and vendors being removed from the chain without immediate replacement, farmers facing higher prices for agricultural inputs due to obstructions in local and international trade routes and local mobility constraints, and, at the same time, reduced output prices because of disruptions at the offtake end of food supply chains. All of these challenges also affected food prices: they often increased for higher-value foods, such as fruits and vegetables, but plummeted for other agricultural commodities, such as cotton, because of the global decline in demand for clothes linked to lockdowns and mobility constraints, leaving women and men farmers with net losses for planted crops.

The articles in this Special Issue provide a range of suggestions on

how to fight against this crisis with a focus on addressing the rapidly widening gap in equity in access to resources between poorer and richer South Asians as well as the gaps in equity between women and men farmers who were differently affected by the crises. The Issue provides many suggestions on where to focus resources and support on. A piece on Nepal calls for food relief, credit provision and asset building programs with a particular focus on rural women. The authors note that nutrition and psychological counselling can also be of critical importance to promote health and well-being of women. A further article further reinforces the notion to strengthen financing for access to food, water and shelter, healthcare and education. Yet another piece calls for the removal of more fundamental constraints that women continue to face in agriculture, specifically the continued lack of land tenure, which affected women's options to borrow funds for surviving COVID-19 and climate extremes. The piece by Kalpana Giri also calls for toppling other fundamental inequities, such as the recognition of women's unpaid domestic and care labor. A further avenue to support women's

agency in agriculture during pandemics and other crises is to strengthen their access to information—on the disease, on climate change and on new income opportunities. Research with SEWA has further strengthened the evidence base that women have reduced access to information and that that access was further curtailed as a result of COVID-19. Thus, while ICTs hold great promise in reaching more farmers faster, at this point, many such approaches create a further divide between those with access to smart phones (and the means to keep them operating) and those who cannot afford such tools—mostly poor rural women. In fact, South Asia is home to the largest number of women who are not connected to mobile phone services. We cannot manage what we cannot measure, but even more so, we cannot manage what we do not know about! Alleviating digital constraints thus needs to be a key priority. Not all is bleak! As Dr. Shweta Sinha suggests, the COVID-19 crisis can also provide an opportunity to intensify agricultural production systems, which in turn can also help the region fight climate change. ■

#### FOOD SECURITY AND GENDER

## Food Security and Women's Well-being: Insights from Rural Nepal

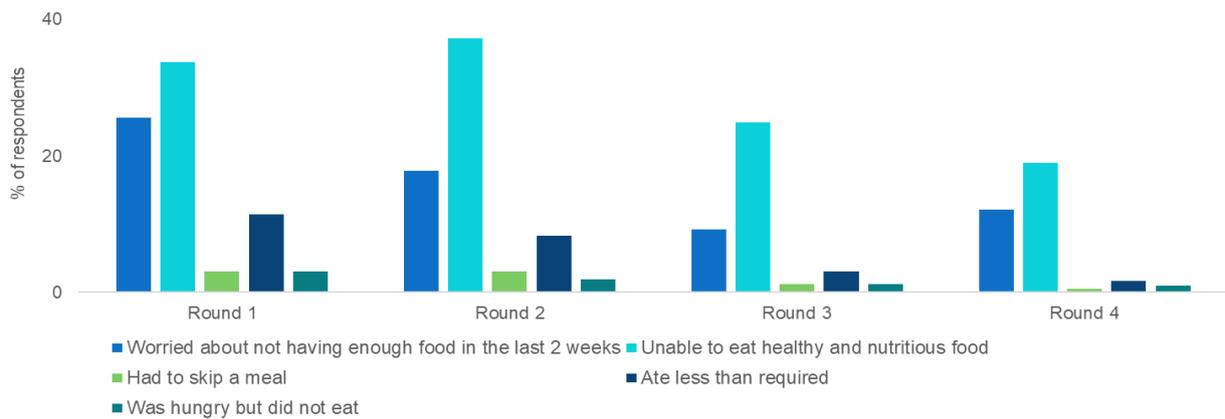
By *Muzna Alvi and Prapti Barooah, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), New Delhi, India*

As the impacts of the COVID-19 continue to be felt across the world, the need to address the vulnerabilities of the poor and marginalized is heightened. In rural and agriculture dependent economies, it is often the farm sector that is most severely impacted in times of crisis, in large part due to the lack of access to risk and loss mitigation measures, and limited

access to government assistance. Among those who are affected, periods of crisis are often worse for vulnerable groups such as children, women and those belonging to historically disadvantaged groups and communities. We use four rounds of phone survey data from farmers in Nepal conducted between June 2020 to January 2021, to study the impacts of the pandemic and

associated lockdowns on maize farmers in Dang district of Nepal, with a focus on food security and dietary diversity. Our sample comprises of nearly 690 respondents, of which 70% are women. The area where our survey is conducted, borders India and thus sees large out-migration of men, leaving women as de-facto heads of households.

Experienced food insecurity in the past two weeks



We find that at the beginning of the pandemic, most households suffered loss in income due to the lockdown, however as movement restrictions began to be eased, impacts on income became muted. However, even as incomes loss was reduced, households continued to experience shocks in the form of reduced food access. We assessed food insecurity using a modified version of FAO’s Food Insecurity Experience Scale for the 2 weeks preceding the survey. We found that a high proportion of women were worried about not having enough food, not being able to eat healthy and nutritious food, and perceived a change in their food access. Overall, we find that women were generally more likely to worry about food insecurity as compared to men. The odds of facing food insecurity was lower among women belonging to households that were economically better off, households that owned land and had migrant members. It was also lower for women who were part of community-based groups.

Food security issues were also manifested in the form of inadequate diversity of diets. Minimum dietary diversity or MDD (W) for female respondents was calculated based on a 24-hour recall period for 10 food groups. Women who consumed at least 5 food groups or more were considered to have adequate dietary diverse diets. We find that around 40-42% women in the first two

rounds of the survey did not achieve MDD; and while this number had declined by round 4, more than one-third women continued to have inadequate diet diversity. In Nepal, this was driven by low consumption of protein and vitamin B12 rich foods (such as dairy; meat, poultry, and fish; eggs; and nuts and seeds). While it is not possible to draw causal linkages using our data, we find that women from households that suffered income loss due to the pandemic and those who borrowed money to cope with this loss had lower odds of achieving MDD.

We find that food insecurity was correlated, not just with economic outcomes, but also other measures of well-being, especially mental health. We administered the Center of Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale or the CESD to assess depressive symptoms among respondents. This consists of 20 statements about how often they experienced different indicators of stress/depression in the week before the survey. The possible range of scores is between 0 to 60 with higher scores indicating the presence of more depressive symptoms. An individual is said to be suffering from probable depression if their score is 16 or above. Going by this definition, we find that 23% women were suffering from probable depression in round 3 (the first time this module was implemented). Looking at the relationship between

food insecurity, dietary diversity and emotional well-being among women, we see that greater food insecurity was associated with higher odds of suffering from depression. On the other hand, achieving MDD was associated with lower odds of suffering from depression.

Our data shows that food insecurity, in various forms, was experienced by women in Nepal through various stages of the lockdown and it may be an important determinant of physical and emotional well-being. Food insecurity and dietary diversity are associated with household economic condition and therefore, there is a strong need to focus on building economic resilience of vulnerable households along with providing relief for income shocks and food insecurity challenges. These may include food relief, credit provision and asset building programs. Such programs should also focus more on women since the impact of crisis are often more severe for women, affecting not only their share in household resources, but also increasing their burden of economic and care work. Nutrition and psychological counselling support for women can also be of critical importance to promote health and well-being. Women focused collectives can help improve women’s access to resources such as credit and social capital as well as serve as a crucial platform to deliver counselling services. ■

# COVID-19 and Gender Equality

By *Mihir R. Bhatt*, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute, India

Started as a global health emergency, COVID-19 has quickly turned into a global economic crisis. Because of lockdowns and subsequent restrictions to arrest the spread of COVID-19, lives and livelihoods, including the education of millions, have been devastatingly affected. The socio-economic impact of the pandemic in South Asia is felt more severe due to high levels of poverty, lack of adequate health infrastructure, lack of social protection, and unprotected informality in economic activities and employment. “A comparison of growth estimates for South Asia for 2020 made before the outbreak of COVID-19 crisis (+6.1%) and after (-2.7%), indicate a substantial -8.8 percentage points loss. A loss of income of this magnitude will have severe social consequences for the livelihoods and wellbeing of people.”<sup>1</sup> And the implications of such consequences may last for years.

Even though mortality rates, as data indicates are much higher for men than for women, women are more likely to suffer the negative long-term socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic.<sup>2</sup> The pandemic is affecting women disproportionately in terms of income loss, increased burden of unpaid care work, higher exposure to risks due to the overrepresentation of women in the health care and garment industry, and due to elevated levels of gender-based violence.<sup>3</sup> “Female employees

represent 80 percent of the workforce in ready-made garment production in Bangladesh, in which industry orders declined by 45.8 percent over the first quarter of 2020, and by 81 percent in April alone.”<sup>4</sup> A recent article from the World Bank blog notes that over a quarter of Pakistani women have been fired or suspended from their jobs in various sectors.<sup>5</sup> Often, experience sharing by many women have revealed that they are co-head of the households if not the only earning member of the family, live in difficult neighbourhoods, and have limited access to social protection and safety.

The COVID-19 crisis will suddenly increase the poverty rate for women and widen the gap between men and women who live in poverty; new data suggests that “the poverty rate for women was expected to decrease by 2.7 percent between 2019 and 2021, but projections now point to an increase of 9.1 percent due to the pandemic and its fallout.”<sup>6</sup> According to the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, “COVID-19 could reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women’s rights.”<sup>7</sup> The gains made in the past decades is at risk and the risk is real. The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities of women, which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic<sup>8</sup> as well as natural hazard induced disasters in South Asia.

South Asia also suffers from what is called cascading uncertainties which

affect women far more severely and drastically in AIDMI’s evaluation work in the region.

Because the COVID-19 crisis affects men and women in different ways, measures to resolve it must take gender into account in both, planning and execution of responses. “Women and girls face specific and often disproportionate economic, health, and social risks due to deeply entrenched inequalities, social norms, and unequal power relations.”<sup>9</sup> In addition they have limited or no voice in decision making and have no say in shaping the policies that will shape their recovery from the most sudden and severe loss and damage.

We see the following three areas where women and girls are particularly at risk.

## Gender-based Violence

Economic stress on families due to any reason can put women and girls at greater risk of violence. As it happened during the 2014-16 Ebola and 2015-16 Zika epidemics, domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence appears to be happening now.<sup>10</sup> “Incidents and evidence are increasingly reported showing that the policy of isolation and confinement leads to increased levels of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence – and therefore to a heightened need of protection against this.”<sup>11</sup> In March 2020, the National<sup>12</sup> Commission For Women in India stated that domestic violence reports have more than *doubled* ever

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/South%20Asia%20Covid-19%20Paper\\_5.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/South%20Asia%20Covid-19%20Paper_5.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(20\)30568-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(20)30568-5/fulltext)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/South%20Asia%20Covid-19%20Paper\\_5.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/South%20Asia%20Covid-19%20Paper_5.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.wto.org/english/news\\_e/news20\\_e/info\\_note\\_covid\\_05aug20\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news20_e/info_note_covid_05aug20_e.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/women-and-girls-must-be-center-pakistans-covid-19-recovery>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2020/COVID-19\\_will\\_widen\\_poverty\\_gap\\_between\\_women\\_and\\_men.html](https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2020/COVID-19_will_widen_poverty_gap_between_women_and_men.html)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/put-women-and-girls-centre-efforts-recover-covid-19>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy\\_brief\\_on\\_covid\\_impact\\_on\\_women\\_9\\_apr\\_2020\\_updated.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_women_9_apr_2020_updated.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/covid-19\\_and\\_human\\_development\\_-\\_gender\\_dashboards\\_final.pdf](http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/covid-19_and_human_development_-_gender_dashboards_final.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/what-the-covid-19-pandemic-tells-us-about-gender-equality/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/gender-equality-commission>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects#>

since the lockdown began.<sup>13</sup> "Currently, the temperature of our men's brain is around 52 degrees Celsius. Whatever comment / small talk we attempt - is misconstrued and they start shouting, screaming, and even beating us... We, the women in the household, have decided to stop talking at all.... The COVID-19 crisis has affected the mental stability of our men" - Reshmaben from Surendranagar, Gujarat. This quote depicts the experience of several members from all over India.<sup>14</sup> Even, small countries like Nepal have experienced an increase in cases of violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 lockdown.<sup>15</sup> And it is well accepted that such reporting of violence in South Asia is low. AIDMI's work with women has found that women do not report violence, not even to other women in their home or neighbourhood, leave aside to any health or social service or police.

#### Health services

COVID-19 threatens girls and women's access to essential sexual and reproductive health services. "The majority of those on the front lines of the pandemic are women, because women make up 70% of all health and social-services staff globally."<sup>16</sup> As per UNICEF estimates, in the nine months dating from when COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, the countries with the highest numbers of forecast births are expected to be India (20.1 million), China (13.5 million), Nigeria (6.4 million), Pakistan (5

million) and Indonesia (4 million).<sup>17</sup> This will require access to health-care for mothers as well as vaccination for newly born children. Due to rigid gender norms limiting women's role outside the home, Afghanistan is facing a massive shortage of female health care staff. This is critically limiting women and girls' access to health care. Afghanistan is one of the countries where mortality rates among mothers and children are among the highest in the world.<sup>18</sup> In India, "due to loss of income and livelihood, and unavailability of cash, many poor families have been forced to cut down on their regular medications for chronic diseases like diabetes, blood pressure, heart ailments, etc. without consulting the doctors."<sup>19</sup>

#### Economic well-being

According to McKinsey Global Institute, women's jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable to this crisis than men's jobs. Women makeup 39 percent of global employment but account for 54 percent of overall job losses. Women's work, especially those in the informal sector economy are badly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Loss of work has put millions of women and girls at increased risk of exploitation and abuse. "Globally, women's finances are weaker than men's, and their position in the labor market is less secure. Moreover, women are more likely to be single parents who will be hit harder by the economic downturn that is now in full swing."<sup>20</sup> COVID-19 is significantly increasing the burden of unpaid care

for women. For example, in Sri Lanka, men were able to access curfew permits during lockdowns to sell farm products and essential items. But women who own small farms and businesses lacked vehicles or funds to hire one and lost both produce and their capital.<sup>21</sup> Access to capital, according to the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is one of the biggest challenges for informal sector workers and their microenterprises.<sup>22</sup>

#### Way Ahead

As the UN policy brief suggests, we must use COVID-19 response planning to rebuild more equal, inclusive, and resilient societies. "This means: including women and women's organization at the heart of the COVID-19 response; (2) transforming the inequities of unpaid care work into a new, inclusive care economy that works for everyone; and (3) designing socio-economic plans with an intentional focus on the lives and futures of women and girls."<sup>23</sup> A day without work is a day without food for millions of daily-wage earners, migrant workers, and self-employed workers. Without an adequate safety net, COVID-19 induced needs are likely to push them into a never-ending debt trap. Women will be hit the hardest. To avoid such a situation, we need to invest in three basic needs of people - food, water, and shelter and provide three primary basic services - healthcare, education, and banking.<sup>24</sup> ■

<sup>13</sup> <https://inbreakthrough.org/covid19-and-impact-on-women/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.rightlivelivelihoodaward.org/media/reema-nanavaty-of-self-employed-womens-association-sewa-strongly-believes-that-poverty-is-one-of-the-worst-forms-of-violence-pandemics-and-economic-crises-set-in-motion-a-spiral-de/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.womankind.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/women-s-rights/covid-19-in-womankind-focus-countries/covid-19-and-women-s-rights-in-nepal>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/what-the-covid-19-pandemic-tells-us-about-gender-equality/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/covid-19-may-have-adverse-effects-on-womens-health-pfi-859881.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2020/06/issue9-gender%20alert%20170620.pdf?la=en&vs=3340>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.rightlivelivelihoodaward.org/media/reema-nanavaty-of-self-employed-womens-association-sewa-strongly-believes-that-poverty-is-one-of-the-worst-forms-of-violence-pandemics-and-economic-crises-set-in-motion-a-spiral-de/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/what-the-covid-19-pandemic-tells-us-about-gender-equality/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://groundviews.org/2020/08/04/disproportionate-effects-of-covid-19-on-sri-lankan-women/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.rightlivelivelihoodaward.org/media/reema-nanavaty-of-self-employed-womens-association-sewa-strongly-believes-that-poverty-is-one-of-the-worst-forms-of-violence-pandemics-and-economic-crises-set-in-motion-a-spiral-de/>

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/South%20Asia%20Covid-19%20Paper\\_5.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/South%20Asia%20Covid-19%20Paper_5.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy\\_brief\\_on\\_covid\\_impact\\_on\\_women\\_9\\_apr\\_2020\\_updated.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_women_9_apr_2020_updated.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-covid-19-pandemic-healthcare-bank-essential-supply-system-ela-r-bhatt-6395643/>

## When Rural Lives are Reduced to Staying Alive

By Mansi Shah, Chhaya Bhavsar and Claudia Ringler, SEWA, India<sup>25</sup>

A recent IFPRI blog pointed to the perils of COVID-19 ravaging rural areas in second and third waves. That blog focused on the key rural risk factors of lack of access to water and health services as well as to the larger and elder populations in many rural areas.

This blog complements this overview with experiences from the ground by [Self-Employed Women's Association](#) (SEWA), a national trade union with a membership base of over 1.5 million poor, self-employed women workers from the informal economy across 16 states in India. Gujarat, one of the states [most affected](#) by India's second COVID-19 wave, and home to a large SEWA membership base, has been experiencing tragic hardship for over than one year, when the first lockdown started a long-term [cycle of indebtedness and food insecurity](#). A key challenge of the second wave is the large number of rural women and men that have become affected by the crisis.

SEWA summarizes the key challenges of the second wave for rural women and men as follows:

1) The first wave was largely characterized by economic hardship experienced particularly by informal workers in the urban sector, which contributed to food insecurity.

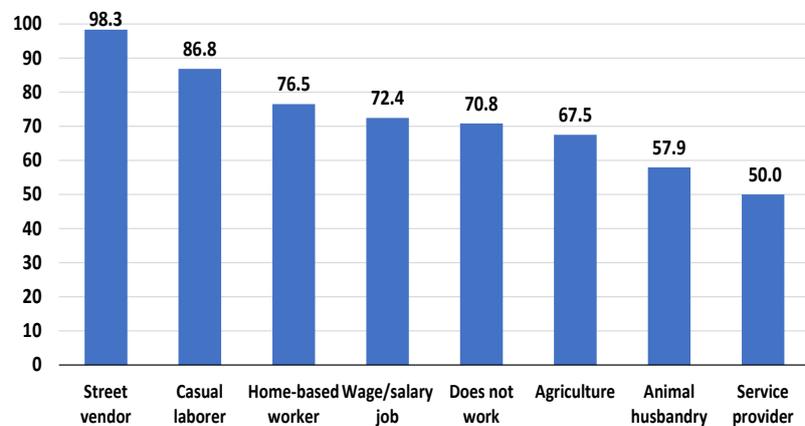


Figure: Women members of SEWA who experienced food insecurity due to Covid-19 lockdown/economic downturn in Gujarat, India (n=620), May 2020, by profession.

- 2) The second wave has extended the economic and food insecurity crisis to an economic, food insecurity and health crisis, with poor rural women and men frantically searching for medicine and other health services in addition to food and income. To support their sick loved ones, many farmers have borrowed amounts of 1 lakh Rupees (equivalent to US\$1,375) or more to procure medicine or oxygen. Several households had to sell their homesteads to obtain funds. Unfortunately, most patients reach the few hospitals too late and many have died, leaving their wives and children with unheard of levels of indebtedness.
- 3) With the health crisis taking over in importance, and a severe lockdown imposed to curb the crisis, crops are now left

standing in the field as farmers are sick, care for sick or are scrambling to find food or medicine for members in their household; the lockdown also added challenges and uncertainty around rural mobility. As reported by Pushpaben, a SEWA leader in Radhanpur in Patan district of Gujarat "some 15 villagers have died of Corona. Unfortunately, most of them were young men and women who were the sole breadwinners of their families. The villagers are being asked to pay Rs 5,000 for an injection; and for Rs 1 lakh (US\$ 1375) deposit before being admitted as a patient at a local dispensary. One villager was handed a bill of Rs 4 lakh (US\$ 5500) for COVID treatment. The poor are scared as they do not have

<sup>25</sup> Mansi Shah is a Senior Technical Coordinator with SEWA.

Chhaya Bhavsar, SEWA's national coordinator for agriculture enhancement; she lost her battle to Covid-19 on May 2. She was 43 years old.

Claudia Ringler is a researcher with the International Food Policy Research Institute and coordinates a project with SEWA on climate change adaptation strategies for rural women.

resources for medical treatment".

- 4) It is impossible to isolate from sick family members in rural homes as they are too small and the spread is too aggressive. SEWA has converted 11 of their rural training centers into COVID-19 isolation centers where family members can get tests and treatment; SEWA is also producing triple-layered masks to contain the spread.
- 5) The Government is trying to help but there are too many concomitant challenges. SEWA has been acting as a liaison between rural women farmers and government agencies, facilitating the purchase of crops that women farmers were still

able to harvest as market linkages have broken down due to COVID-19.

- 6) Vaccination levels remain low, among others, due to limited trust in vaccines in many rural areas. Rumors of vaccines not working and overcrowded, poorly equipped vaccination facilities further lower farmers' willingness to get vaccinated. SEWA is supporting awareness campaigns around the importance of vaccination. As described by Alkaben, a SEWA leader in Anand district. "People go into hiding in the farms or run away on seeing a government health department vehicle. They feel the injection will give them the disease and even death. We are constantly

creating awareness about the benefits of vaccination and are readying the rural folks to get the shot. It is a tough exercise but we are committed."

As Mansi summarizes: "We do not think about the future anymore. The situation is now to just try to stay alive." Longer-term consequences such as lack of access to education for children--often for more than a year now-- together with reductions in food consumption and limited access to more nutritious food, much higher levels of indebtedness and losses of key breadwinners in the family require multiple levels of support both immediately--to relieve health shocks and food insecurity--and in the longer term to rebuild rural asset bases of women and men farmers and their families. ■

#### GENDER, AGRICULTURE AND LAND RIGHTS

## Impact of the Pandemic on Agriculture, Gender and Land Rights

By Kalpana Giri, PhD., RECOFTC, Thailand

Women play significant roles in agriculture in Asia. They are culturally responsible for ensuring household food security, due to their domestic and care roles within existing gender divisions of labor. The high rates of male outmigration are also making the rural agricultural production increasingly feminized. Despite these responsibilities, agriculture and current food systems neither recognize nor monetize women's role and contribution at farm and agriculture. Across food systems, majority of women working in agriculture lack land rights and linked to this, rights to water, credit, labor, extension services, membership in cooperatives and decision-making bodies. They are

underrepresented in decision-making bodies within agriculture and forest systems and their priorities are hardly addressed. Even when women work, they are forced to work on depressed wages without legal and social protections. As such, lack of recognition, lack of rights, lack of job security builds on the vulnerability of women and prohibits their resiliency.

The COVID pandemic has hit economies and lives, with women facing disproportionate economic and social impacts. Social norms and increased care duties in the wake of mobility-related restrictions have increased women's workloads. Women workers engaged in the

informal and formal value chain of farm systems have lost jobs and incomes. Scope and breadth of agricultural extension have curtailed women's access to timely extension and advisory services. Agriculture is being considered one of the major sectors to sustain rural households, maintain food systems, and extend the gains made in gender equality in the post-COVID scenario.

Moving forward in the context of COVID precarity, a focus on women's agency and land rights are vital for ensuring food security, agricultural productivity, and gender equality. Such a vision would require some fundamental changes. For instance, it is critical to recognize

the rights of women farmers to land and forestry resources and its impact on women's identity and access to agriculture services. Land and forest policies need to guarantee women's human rights, and rights to forest tenure, ensuring equal entitlements to resources as male 'farmers', and recognize women's paid and unpaid, productive, domestic, and care labor, central to nutritional outcomes. Institutional mechanisms and extension and advisory services need to be aligned to enforce gender equity and this requires not just recognition of women's contributions to food systems, but equal representation in decision-making bodies at all levels, whether related to policy-making, service provision, or agricultural research.

Governments have an important role to play in the post-COVID scenario. Farm families are suffering due to

COVID, so the government needs to provide more assistance, such as education/capacity opportunities targeted to women and low-income households in the hard-hit areas. For immediate relief, agriculture extensions and outreach services need to be enabled to provide easier access to food and nutrition through food packages and cash transfers. Partnerships between the private sector and civil society organizations/women's groups (with a focus on women/community-level) are also important to strengthen, including through government assistance to support these types of partnerships. More support can be provided to the marketing of agricultural products during the COVID pandemic. Learning from COVID, a more holistic social protection system is needed to deal with risks, including finance, and insurance (health, but

also weather and crop insurance, pension), and easier access to inputs and technology. Such short-term relief programs need to be combined with programs that are designed to strengthen both the individual and collective capacity of women, especially those most vulnerable, to have a greater role and rights in shaping their food and forest systems through creating and supporting democratic, inclusive and participatory spaces. A major drive should be focused on removing the structural barriers to women's ownership of and control of land and other productive assets through rights-based approaches and other instruments such as social and environmental standards and responsible investment frameworks - and demand accountability from all partners on the progress towards the realization of these rights. ■



*Farming in Indonesia.*

## Building a Resilient Community through Improved Food and Nutrition Security Gharbadi (Kitchen Garden) 3 Decimil Model: Harvesting Happiness on a Plate!

By *Sukanya Chatterjee*, Lead – Organisation & Program Sustainability, IGSSS; and *Amar Kumar Gouda*, Program Officer, IGSSS, New Delhi, India

Indo-Global Social Service Society (IGSSS) has been implementing its CRAFT-K project in 20 villages in the remote block of Karlamunda of Kalahandi District in Odisha from March 2018. 1000 small plot holders, the project is facilitating these marginal farming families to adopt low cost, climate resilience agri-practices.

These marginal farmers (land <2 ha) undertake Kharif paddy and a few vegetables. Post kharif, these families consume only such food which they have stock of that they can afford to buy from market. Additionally, shift from non-food cash crop has adversely impacted food crop as well as natural farm biodiversity resulting in increased market dependency. Drought and flash floods are a common feature which has over the

years risen in both severity and frequency. Problems in germination, poor harvest, pest attack, crop disease outbreak, crop loss have led to severe agrarian crisis. As a result, food insecurity has been on the rise.

**A sustained solution to this is Gharbadi cultivation (3 Decimil Model of Homestead Garden) for providing access to fresh, clean, chemical free food on around the year basis.**



*Ambubati Putel, Dhanrakhman Village, Karlamunda, Kalahandi in her Gharbadi.*

### Gharbadi Production

Year/Season	Production month	Vegetable Production in Kilogram, Total land 3.5 Acr (kg)
2019 Kharif Season	July - September, 2019	27,700
2019 Rabi Season	Oct. - Feb., 2020	35,200
<b>COVID-19 lockdown period (Phase one 25<sup>th</sup> March 2020 to Phase 4, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020)</b>	March - June, 2020	24,400
2020 Kharif Season	July - Sept., 2020	32,100
2020 Rabi Season	Oct. - Feb., 2021	36,800

- Total homestead (Gharbadi) land cultivated: 3.5 acres
- Total Annual production (of variety of fresh nutritious vegetables): 93,300 kg;
- Average Production: 466.5 Kg
- Total Production during COVID Lockdown: 24,400 Kg
- Total Input costs (Seed, Saplings, Compost, hormone, Bio-pesticide and Herbicide): Rs. 3000/-
- Cost of vegetables in Market 12,310/-
- Profit per household: 9310
- Total Number of women (1 woman per family): 200
- Total number of family members benefitted: 800 Approximately
- Contribution to average annual income – 7-9% of total family income is being added through kitchen Garden

In Khariff 2019, IGSSS piloted this Model with 200 women from 20 villages to produce and consume clean, green, safe and nutrition vegetables for round the year. The women were facilitated to undertake planned systematic vegetable cultivation in the Homestead land. A properly designed and managed 400 square feet of Gharbadi can provide 0.8 to 1.2 kg seasonal vegetables and fruits daily round the year or 445 kg of diverse vegetables annually. For a family of 4, annual requirement<sup>26</sup> is 438 kg.

The pilot covered 3.5 acres of kitchen garden in homestead land for producing vegetables round the year. The homestead garden uses only bio-pesticides and compost and household wastewater. Prior to IGSSS's intervention, these women

would grow only 5-7 types of vegetables and not at one time. Currently, each Gharbadi is producing between 15-24 varieties of vegetables and fruit species.

The pilot brought a change in the mindset that cultivation requires plentiful water, chemical fertilisers and pesticides and highlighted the role of women and youth in farming.

This success is now inspiring men to take up nutritious kitchen garden seriously, earlier a strict domain of the household women. Jagannath Bhoi marginal farmer, "Those who had kitchen gardens did not face any problem in the lockdown, but those who didn't eat rice with salt. With nutritious kitchen garden we will stop buying vegetables daily. We will save our money and can sell

surplus vegetable in the market to get additional income".

The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown restricted movement and employment opportunities and livelihoods impacted. Migrants returned home with empty pockets and their savings totally exhausted, unable to initiate any livelihood option. Food insecurity specially among the resource and cash strapped vulnerable marginal households. Hunger periods have risen exponentially along with a drastic impact on the levels of malnutrition.

The response from government, agencies, CSOs was largely focused on emergency, relief Pandemic management. With the frequency and severity of disaster events on the rise, the coping capacities of affected communities are on the rise. As the COVID-19 Pandemic has shown, its impact has been immediate and furious, the repercussions of which are yet to be fully realized. With no end in sight of the Current Pandemic and the very real possibility of another, Disaster Risk Reduction strategy needs to be rethought to address the issues at the core - food and income security.

**Access to fresh, clean, chemical free food for the entire family on around the year basis will be a key Disaster Risk Reduction strategy to support small and marginal rural families meet their food and dietary intake.**



*Every farmer should produce and conserve seeds, organic compost and natural bio pesticides in homeyard to become self-reliant, says Jayanti Bhoi a tribal woman farmer of Kansil village and the Secretary of Adivasi Self Help Group, Kansil."*

<sup>26</sup> World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends a daily intake of at least 400 grams vegetables and fruits for an adult person. A family of four require 1.2 kg vegetables daily.

# COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact and Recovery Efforts by Small Informal Businesses

By Vishal Pathak, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute, India

Over three-fourths of small businesses have been adversely affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. AIDMI's ongoing action-research studies between June 2020 to May 2021 revealed the top challenges for small businesses, which included scaling-up, - market access, improving the overall productivity, access to finance and dealing with uncertainty. Last year, the small businesses, self-employed, owner-driven or mini family businesses were the worst hit. Their importance has generally been underestimated and ignored. Their number forms the invisible backbone of India's economy. They are the biggest employers. The impact on small businesses is high and their recovery is around big challenges such as lost orders and clients; lack of operating capital for extended periods of time; out migration of trained labour, etc. These adverse impacts further increased in the second wave.

With the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the limited gains made in the past decades on gender equality are at risk of being rolled back. Social

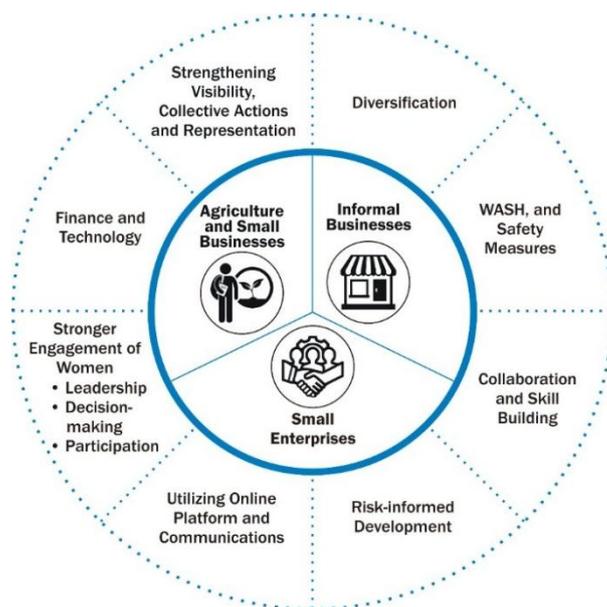
norms prevent women from accessing mentorship and training. In 2018-2019, 4.9% of women received informal business training, vs. 12.9% men (PLFS, 2018-2019).

The widespread socio-economic impacts of the virus are still unfolding. Growing field evidence shows that the pandemic is reinforcing inequalities, especially between men and women. Based on the discussion with women members in rural areas, a range of adverse impacts have been reported that are going to affect families in the long-term. Chiefly, these negative impacts would be on women in informal economy; unpaid care work; health impact; gender-based violence; disrupted local economy.

COVID-19 is not only a challenge for health systems, but also a test of our human spirit. Recovery must lead to a more equal world that is more resilient to future crises. The support programmes must focus for rectifying inequalities and strive to build a more just and resilient world of women. Therefore, while planning for any kind of recovery, it is

important to account for not only the enhanced vulnerability of women, but also their indispensable role of leaders of recovery in their local communities. Based on the impact of pandemic on women from poor and marginalized groups, the recovery efforts should not only respond to the pandemic but also aim to build more equal, inclusive and sustainable economic and social interventions. The small informal business community should be targeted for finance support, however for effective recovery, the support should be combined with other economic recovery and capacity building tools - facilitation support, digital learning and information communication, increased provision of credit, elimination of discrimination against women, decent work, building skills, required modifications, and diversification.

When disasters strike, small businesses are harder hit by economic impacts. Small and informal businesses generally earn less, save less and disproportionately hold jobs that are more insecure in the informal economy or service sector with less access to social protections. Every COVID-19 response plans and every recovery package and budgeting of resources, needs to address the impacts of the pandemic on small informal businesses. Putting small and informal businesses at the centre of economies in countries like India will fundamentally drive better and more sustainable development outcomes for all and support a more rapid recovery. The recovery and future steps should consider adapting existing programmes to reduce barriers of small businesses; targeting of programmes for small businesses; expand delivery options to be gender-sensitive and to rural and urban context needs. ■

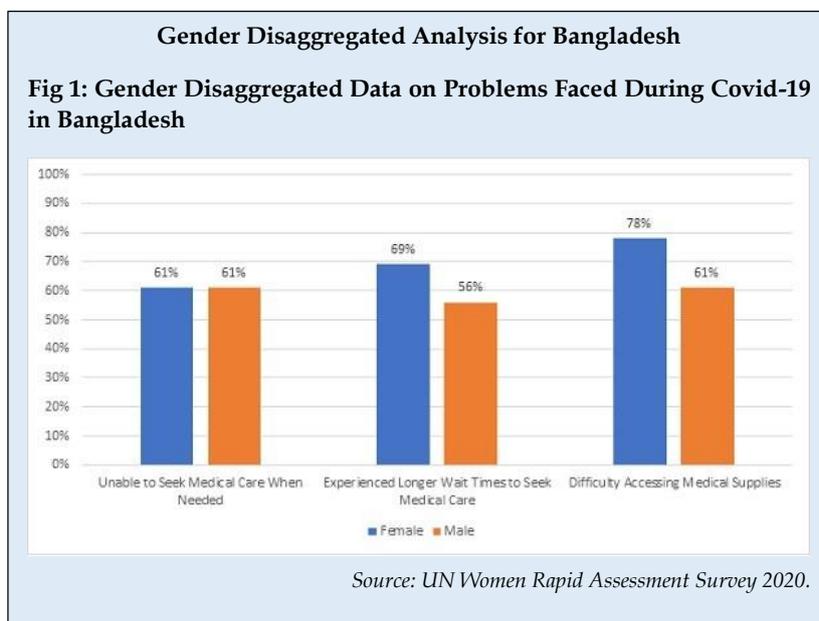


# Impact of the Second Wave on Women in Bangladesh: A View

By *Mahbuba Nasreen*, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Bangladesh Open University, Bangladesh<sup>27</sup>

Disasters are frequent a phenomenon in Bangladesh. Lessons learned from disasters helped Bangladesh to gradually strengthen her preparedness activities, making the country's identity as one of the 'resilient' nations. This resilience has been contributed by all segments of the population; however, it is argued over the last 30 years (Nasreen, 1995; 2019) that women are the major contributors in building resilience. Despite overcoming many challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic calls for a new preparedness for Bangladesh as of the affected countries around the world. Now the question arises: can the pandemic be termed as a disaster? Several reasons have been identified for linking COVID 19 pandemic with a disaster:

1. Firstly, from the perspective of the concept of disaster ("a relatively sudden event which causes threats for lives, properties & go beyond the capacity of a community or society to manage such crises")
2. Secondly, the pandemic is triggering risk and shocks for existing social structure, on which the system has no firm control
3. Thirdly, the pandemic also urges for managing risk and improving social safety nets for vulnerable people just like during any other disaster.
4. Finally, the experiences of managing the COVID 19



pandemic has provided opportunities for redressing the multi-hazard, multi risk and emergency management activities through strengthening risk governance (Revet, 2020; Montano & Savitt, 2020; Nasreen, 2020).

The Multiple challenges faced by women during the first and second wave of the pandemic have been identified:

- i) increased burden of unpaid work. On average women are involved 3.43 times as much unpaid care work as men (BBS, 2019) in Bangladesh. Studies (BRAC, 2020/UNDP, 2020) indicate that 91 percent of women have to shoulder higher amounts of unpaid care work during COVID-19 pandemic;
- ii) increased domestic

violence: From January to June 2020, there were 601 cases of rape (increasing from 76 in April to 94 in May & 174 in June), 107 deaths of women due to domestic abuse, and 103 sexual abuse cases leading to 9 suicides (ASK; UNDP, 2020); iii) Increased rate of unemployment: most of the female domestic workers in urban areas lost their jobs in the lockdown period. Since the month of November, 2020 till May, 2021 the rate of COVID-affected have reduced to a certain extent and lockdown was relaxed which brought some of the domestic and other informal sector women back at work. However, in July 2021 the strict lockdown restricted their movements shrinking the income. Only in few cases these women were paid their salaries

<sup>27</sup> Note: the paper is prepared based on the presentation "Managing the Pandemic: Redressing Gender and Disaster Resilience" in the Webinar 5 at the International Conference on Celebrating the 100 Years of the University of Dhaka: Reflections from the Alumni - National and International, 30 May 2021

through mobile phone services or in person; iv) women's lack of access to reproductive health care services have been recorded due to restricted mobility in the public sphere, hospitals and other places (WHO, OECD/ UNDP, 2020); v) the most alarming was the increase of child marriage (ASK, Un Women).

COVID-19 pandemic has set a different pattern than previous disasters and pandemics by the uncertainty of how easily the virus spreads among people (MoHFW, 2020). Accompanying current health crisis, pre-existing health condition, healthy practice, social behavior, norms, and gender inequalities embedded in various sectors, compel to scrutinize pandemic impacts through a gender lens. Gender-inclusive pandemic study is the demand of the time as re-enforced gender roles often make gendered division of labor critical where violation of one party (especially women considering Bangladesh context) more vulnerable and victim to domestic violation, economic stress (Nasreen, 2008). Understanding rural urban differences of Pandemic effects. Policy response mechanisms do not incorporate gender analytical data or gender-responsive plans for COVID-

19 (Rapid Gender Assessment led by Humanitarian Working Group supported by GBV, Child Protection Cluster and other agencies, cited in Dutta, 2020). To understand the broader picture of the relationship between COVID-19 and gender based resilience, more in-depth research needs to be executed. ■

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At least One million workers in Ready Made Garment sector lose job during Covid-19.

# COVID-19: An Opportunity to Intensify Agriculture Food Systems in India

By Dr. Shweta Sinha, PBIC, Thammasat University, Thailand



NREGA labourers at Nayagaon village. Photo credit: Darpan Chhabra, Prayatna Samiti.

COVID-19 continues to affect agriculture, nutrition and food systems as global economy slows down and human development gets adversely impacted. A huge market shift has taken place due to the changes in demand and supply post movement restrictions forcing producers to find new outlets for food production. The agriculture sector has been a traditional strength for India contributing to 15.9 percent of GDP and employs about 49 percent labor with 85 percent being small and marginalized farmers. COVID-19 makes it essential to support the poor in informal sectors and help them overcome the challenges till their livelihood losses are regained. The central statistics office in India suggested that gross value added (GVA) is expected to reduce by 19.9 percent in Q1 FY21, due to the overall contraction across

sectors, excluding agriculture (including forestry, fishing) and public expenditure<sup>28</sup>.

## COVID-19 Impact

The pandemic lockdown period coincided with the peak rabi season impacting the entire value chain. Increased inter-state migration created panic when the Union Home Ministry allowed the movement of farmers, laborers, harvesting machines during the lockdown. Workers without agricultural skills too migrated adding to the existing agricultural laborers in the villages increasing the challenge of gainfully employing and feeding the new migration labourer in the villages. Difficulties in logistics and trade also influenced the pricing of agricultural products. Apart from negative impacts, India's Horticulture production has reached a record

320.48 million tons in 2020 about 3.13 percent higher than 2019<sup>29</sup>.

Recent ADB-ILO report estimated 28.8 percent of total youth job loss in the agriculture sector of India due to COVID-19<sup>30</sup>. According to the monetary policy committee, despite all these activities, there has been good agricultural output in the last two seasons, but the supply and logistical bottlenecks have increased food inflation.

## Government Interventions

Post lockdown, government declared the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund worth INR 1.7 trillion which transferred direct cash benefit to 85 million small farmers through the PM-KISAN scheme. The 10-year scheme would provide the farmers with a medium - long term debt financing facility for projects

<sup>28</sup> The Economic Times, [https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/indias-gdp-to-contract-by-20-per-cent-in-first-quarter-of-fy21-care-ratings/articleshow/77637707.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/indias-gdp-to-contract-by-20-per-cent-in-first-quarter-of-fy21-care-ratings/articleshow/77637707.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

<sup>29</sup> <https://ruralmarketing.in/industry/agriculture/indias-horticulture-production-to-be-32048-million-tonnes-in-2019-20>

<sup>30</sup> ADB-ILO, Tackling the COVID-19 Youth Employment Crisis in Asia and the Pacific, accessed 24th August 2020

involving post-harvest management infrastructure and community farming assets. About 3985 MT of pulses has been delivered to different states/UTs through PM-GKY scheme<sup>31</sup>. Government raised the wages for farmers under NREGS, provided grains/seeds to the registered beneficiaries for the next three months. PM-CARES emergency fund is also supporting migrant workers. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) provided concession on crop loans to support the farmers.

NGOs are also playing influential roles during pandemic. Prayatna

Samiti, a national NGO in collaboration with donors and government is working in 30 villages of Jhalara block of Udaipur, Rajasthan to build awareness on COVID-19, enrolling migrants in NREGA, organizing orientation to SHGs and distributing ration kits and seeds.

#### Opportunity

The pandemic provides an opportunity to intensify agriculture food systems through credit and finance related policies in order to manage risks for poor farmers and make it easier for the small holder

farmers to sell their produce in high value markets. Entrepreneurs in the area of agriculture should be encouraged and rewarded for leveraging on digital technologies as they can support social distancing better. Setting up a single window for the agricultural entrepreneurs would boost the overall movement. Participation of private entity and relevant NGOs can build robust clusters and encourage inflow of investments that can help improving the overall efficiency and resilience of food ecosystems. ■

### AGRICULTURE RECOVERY

## COVID-19: Future Prospects and Strategies in Agriculture

By Md. Anwarul Abedin, Professor, Laboratory of Environment and Sustainable Development, Department of Soil Science, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh, Bangladesh

Over the last century, several plagues and epidemics such as The Spanish Flu (1918-1920), Asian flu (1957-1958), and H1N1 Swine Flu Pandemic (2009-2010) have pulverized the human race. Currently, humanity is affected by the COVID-19 (Coronavirus), which has altered human history as far as the economy is concerned. This COVID-19 pandemic may have the most significant impact on the future prosperity of the world. For a country like Bangladesh, agriculture can play a vital role in overcoming the upcoming challenges in the post-COVID-19 era. Bangladesh is already a country which depends quite heavily on agriculture. Almost 87 percent of the rural population gets at least some income from agriculture. Agriculture growth has stimulated the non-farm economy in Bangladesh: a 10 percent rise in farm incomes generates a 6.0 percent rise in non-farm profits. As non-farm incomes are correlated with agricultural production, the government needs to focus on

fostering a more robust and sustainable production system in the post-COVID-19 era.

Breakdown of Agriculture Sector

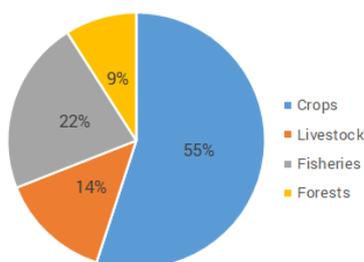


Figure 1: Breakdown of agricultural sectors in Bangladesh (Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics)

During this critical COVID-19 era; for more productive, sustainable and resilient agricultural production, food and nutrition security that may meet COVID-19 pandemic challenges are the following:

- Providing soft loans and free seeds, fertilizer, pesticides to farmers and ensuring supply and distribution of land preparation and post-harvest machinery.

- Irrigation facilities should be ensured for the upcoming rabi season to ensure water supply in the crop field.
- Fallow land should be brought under cultivation processes.
- Cropping intensity should be increased with modern agricultural practices. The farmers should be encouraged to cultivate not only cereals but also pulses, oils crops and vegetables, livestock and fish culture.
- For the rapid urbanization, urban agriculture and rooftop gardening can be a way of growing fruits, vegetables and so on and can ensure nutrition security.
- Forecasting should be done for natural disasters like floods, storms and drought to minimize the losses.
- Modern technology such as floating agriculture can be used in flood-affected areas to grow vegetable crops and use the water for fish farming.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.jatinverma.org/steps-taken-to-facilitate-the-farmers-and-farming-activities-during-the-lockdown-period>

- Ease (non-health and safety-related) regulatory requirements for farmers to access seasonal labor through migration programs.
- Modern technology should be used for livestock rearing and fish farming, such as aquaponics, giving higher economic returns to ensure meat, milk and fish production throughout the country.
- Post-processing, preservation facilities of agricultural products should be developed and ensured for reducing losses and higher market prices.
- Proper pricing should be ensured for farmers to encourage agricultural production.
- Explore ways to maintain transport links, to the extent

possible, to facilitate the movement of food products and ensure farmers' access to input and output markets.

- Co-operate with private stakeholders to identify and address bottlenecks to the smooth functioning of food supply chains.
- A steady supply chain will be of utmost importance to reach the final consumer, whether at home or abroad.
- Enhancing trade facilitation and logistics across borders to essential agricultural inputs such as pesticides and veterinary medicines.
- Work with stakeholders and international organizations to identify weaknesses, choke points and vulnerabilities in agriculture and food systems,

and critical services that need to be strengthened to increase preparedness for systemic risks.

It isn't easy to figure out precisely the magnitude of the effects of COVID-19 for humanity, agricultural production and economy (Figure 2). However, the focus has yet to be given to manage the pandemic situation. Significant changes in policies and financing will be needed to maintain the advances in agricultural production, food, and nutrition security perspectives. To ensure the farm production, food and nutrition security, decrease losses and waste of food, every nation including all stakeholders, government, non-government organizations, researchers and experts have to formulate a way forward for an exerted effort to overcome pandemic COVID-19 era. ■



Figure 2: COVID-19 Impact on agricultural market.

## COVID-19 RESPONSE

# Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls

The Second Wave of the pandemic in India has caused avoidable loss of life and damage to livelihood throughout the country. This is especially true for cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad. The impact is even more on the women and girls, especially in the low income settlements. About rural areas we know little.

One way to deal with this direct catastrophic impact of the Second Wave of the pandemic is to take up the recommendations of UNWOMEN in its report titled, "Recommendations into Action Brief COVID-19: Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls" ([Click here](#)).

Women must be safe. And girls must be safer. This is possible at least in Indian cities during the second wave. ■

**Recommendations into Action Brief  
COVID-19: Safe Cities and Safe Public  
Spaces for Women and Girls**

**INTRODUCTION**

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused massive disruptions to daily lives and the operation of businesses and services, especially to health, social services, transport, hospitality, economic development, education, and recreation sectors with various measures in place in countries across different waves of the pandemic including, lockdowns, quarantines, curfews, harassment and other forms of violence facilitated through these channels.<sup>1</sup>

The pandemic has exacerbated violence against women and girls in public and private spaces. While some may assume that given the current context public spaces must be safer, however emerging data demonstrates the contrary. As women continue to use and be present in public spaces, especially those working in health and essential services, and in the informal sector, they face heightened risks to sexual and other forms of violence, with fewer bystanders and witnesses in public spaces. In online spaces, an overreliance on technology for communication and other transactions has also seen a rise in sexual harassment and other forms of violence facilitated through these channels.<sup>2</sup>

The year 2021 commemorates the 10-year anniversary of UN Women's Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Strategy, the first global programme that aims to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence that women and girls often experience and fear in public spaces.<sup>3</sup>

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# COVID-19 and Women's Participation in Higher Education

By Dr. Tayyaba Tamim, (PhD Cambridge UK), Associate Professor & Director Academics, School of Education, Lahore University of Management Science, Pakistan

Higher education of women may be the last thing on the mind of governments consumed as they are by the urgency to grapple with the challenges of COVID-19. However, the toll that COVID-19 may take on women's retention in higher education merits urgent attention, given the wider social, economic and political implications otherwise. Women's dropping out of higher education will not only threaten the achievement of Goal 4<sup>32</sup> but also Goal 5<sup>33</sup> while undermining all the other SDGs 2030.<sup>34</sup>

As COVID-19 exaggerates the existing vulnerabilities of women, they may be the first to leave higher education. The traditional financial dependence of women on male members (McMunn, Bird, Webb & Sacker, 2020),<sup>35</sup> and a general devaluation of their education (UNDP 2020)<sup>36</sup> may mean that women may be forced, or they might opt to give up their higher education in times of financial distress. Second, pursuing higher education online at home, where women carry the main

weight of time intensive domestic work (McMunn, Bird, Webb, & Sacker, 2020),<sup>37</sup> could be very difficult as the intensity of this work mounts, with everyone being home, likelihood of someone being sick, schooling the young,<sup>38</sup> and with little reprieve from this space of unending work (Milkie, Raley, & Bianchi, 2009).<sup>39</sup> Third, the well-documented gendered digital divide especially in low-income countries (Brännström, 2012<sup>40</sup>; UNDP, 2020)<sup>41</sup> could be a serious blow to women's access to higher education. Fourth, women are the primary victims in the surge in domestic violence, during COVID-19 (Usher, et.al. 2020)<sup>42</sup>. Fifth, the

uncertain times of COVID-19 could trigger early marriages, as witnessed in earlier health emergencies and natural disasters (Moreno & Shaw, 2018).<sup>43</sup> Lastly, the toll all this may have taken on the physical and mental wellbeing of women could force them to drop out. It is important then that women are specifically supported in higher education. This could begin with a recognition and proactive exploration of the unique obstacles women face in pursuing higher education in their context, followed by multidimensional plans to support them by forging local and global partnerships. ■



University of Management and Technology, Pakistan.

<sup>32</sup> This calls for inclusive, quality education for all, and particularly its target 4.3 pledges equity in access at tertiary level UNESCO (2017). Ensure quality education for all: Sustainable development goal 4; ten targets. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259784>

<sup>33</sup> The goal aims to end all forms of gender based discrimination,

<sup>34</sup> UNESCO. (2015). Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld#:~:text=The%20High%2Dlevel%20Political%20Forum,Summit%20on%2025%20September%202015.&text=This%20Agenda%20is%20a%20plan,for%20people%2C%20planet%20and%20prosperity.>

<sup>35</sup> McMunn, A., Bird, L., Webb, E., & Sacker, A. (2020). Gender divisions of paid and unpaid work in contemporary UK couples. *Work, Employment and Society*, 34(2), 155-173

<sup>36</sup> UNDP (2020) Social Justice for women amidst covid-19 May 14, 2020, [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)

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## Views of the Pandemic: Rural Development Studies

By Prof. Dr. Suresh V. Nadagoudar, Principal, University Law College & Dept. of Studies in Law, Bangalore University, Karnataka, India

### Introduction

Rural development is a multidimensional phenomenon. The political concern relates to power, resources, priorities, and choice; accountability is an essential component of rural development. Local government is often the centrepiece of rural political systems, interventions to reconfigure local government are, therefore, typical rural development initiatives, they serve to additionally supplement, neutralize or detract from other development initiatives. Development of the developing or underdeveloped countries will be possible with the development of the rural areas. In this context, rural development studies have a pivotal place in our country; therefore, focusing on social models is necessary rather than economic models.

### Implications of COVID-19 on Rural Development

The present Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic has brought in a huge surge in the action towards the policy makers to reconsider the current system lacunas and make them more strong to counter the future disasters. Further, the sequence of expenditure-based initiatives declared by the government for the rural economy such as raising of allocations of recent Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyan as well as MNREGA, the allocations have an emphasis on rural housing, plantations, drinking water, roads, and toilets, etc. are assured of having a multiplier effect on employment

generation, investment and consumption. However, the Rural Management education administers the course of managing and optimizing pastoral agricultural resources effectively. The effect of COVID-19 will have long-run implications on the rural economy, and it may increase in significant demand for rural management and developmental studies for professionals shortly. The students aspiring to pursue management or development studies, a course in rural management might be a bright and socially conscious choice at this juncture.

### Views on the Rural Development Studies During Pandemic

The occurrence of COVID-19 Pandemic has made the rural people trapped too much on the lower side of the middle class with a lot of turbulence. Further, multi-source casualties make the people feel they cannot get out of their miserable situation, so the rural livelihoods are being highly affected. There needs to be a supportive effort in which governments, inter-governmental agencies, business work, non-governmental organizations, together with local communities to secure an active, rapid response. Further, educating people about the spreading of disease is also a key factor, the disease's risk in rural areas is high due to lack of awareness, low levels of nutrition, insufficient public health centres and most importantly limited supply of clean water and district hospitals.

As we enter the new normal, the entire world is expected to witness and experience more relative poverty and situational poverty, even in rich developing countries. Therefore, firstly a model needs to be established, with concrete standard operating procedures and best practices that can be replicated throughout rural India to combat pandemics. Secondly, the local self-government should manage with the administration to utilize the funds of panchayats. Further, collaborating with self-help groups besides setting isolation conditions within village premises (sanitizers, cooked meals, drinking water, etc.) in several interior blocks across India's districts will help improve severe conditions. Moreover, involving panchayats and considering sufficient safety measures to establish isolation facilities across the length is the need of the hour.

### Conclusion

The pandemic COVID-19 is the new normal now and it might open chances to see the hidden rural capacity and develop their intrinsic resources, post Financial year 2020 the rural development policy would build on the wealth of experience and commitment of a broader scope of rural factors, further to increase effectiveness, it will have to respond to a host of drivers and changes in rural regions. The agricultural policy should concern all economic sectors, strengthen social action and environmental considerations. ■

## Contributors:

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*Dr. Claudia Ringler, Deputy Director, Environment and Production Technology Division, CGIAR, IFPRI, USA* 2
- 2. Food Security and Women's Well-being: Insights from Rural Nepal**  
*Muzna Alvi and Prapti Baroorah, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), New Delhi, India* 3
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The views expressed in this publication are those of the author.

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### Editorial Advisors:

#### Anoja Seneviratne

Director (Mitigation Research & Development), Disaster Management Centre of Government of Sri Lanka

#### Denis Nkala

Regional Coordinator, South-South Cooperation and Country Support (Asia-Pacific), United Nations Development Programme, New York

#### G. Padmanabhan

Former Emergency Analyst, UNDP

#### Dr. Ian Davis

Visiting Professor, Kyoto University, Japan; Lund University, Sweden and Oxford Brookes University, United Kingdom and Honorary Visiting Professor; Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Europe

#### Mihir R. Bhatt

All India Disaster Mitigation Institute, India

#### Dr. Prabodh Dhar Chakrabarti

Lead Consultant of UNDP in India and Myanmar, and Formerly Secretary NDMA and Executive Director NIDM

#### Dr. Satchit Balsari, MD, MPH

Assistant Professor, Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Boston, USA



## ALL INDIA DISASTER MITIGATION INSTITUTE

411 Sakar Five, Behind Old Natraj Cinema, Ashram Road, Ahmedabad-380 009 India.

Tele/Fax: +91-79-2658 2962

E-mail: bestteam@aidmi.org, Website: <http://www.aidmi.org>, [www.southasiadisasters.net](http://www.southasiadisasters.net)