

Summary Report

Global COVID-19 Network | Webinar Learning Series

Social and Economic Impacts of COVID-19

Moderator

- **Dr. Subhash Hira** | Professor of Global Health, University of Washington, Seattle; Sambodhi/ISRN New Delhi

Speakers

- **Dr. Swati Maheshwari** | Senior Internal Medicine Specialist, TV Show Host, India
- **Mr. Anish Kumar** | Co-lead, Transform Rural India Foundation, India
- **Dr. Srinivas Shroff** | Chief Executive Officer, REC Foundation, India

Discussion Summary

The 6th session of the webinar learning series explored the theme of ‘Social and Economic Impacts of COVID-19’. Speakers from health, civil society, and the media shared valuable insights on how the pandemic is having varied socio-economic impact on countries that declared a variety of lockdown restrictions such as ‘light’, or ‘moderate’ or ‘severe’ forms. Early shut-down of international borders by Vietnam in January 2020 much before any other country, and community participation have reaped positive Socio-Economic impacts.

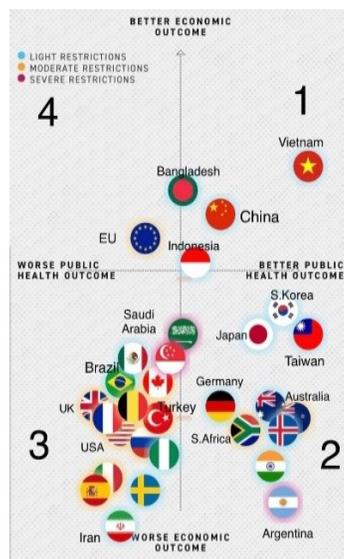
Dr. Swati Maheshwari of India shared perspectives on the changing social landscape of urban India and Southern countries, emphasizing the impact of the pandemic on marginalized populations and vital SDG parameters such as gender equality, education, employment, refugees, and environmental protection. She warned against the historical correlation between epidemics and increase in human trafficking, stating that COVID-19 will also offset gross human rights violations on women, refugees, and children. She emphasized the need for scale-up in counseling services for lonely patients/families with COVID and to accelerate community participation as a priority intervention.

Mr. Anish Kumar discussed the rural experience of the pandemic from the social and economic standpoint. Addressing the misconceptions that rural areas are less population dense than urban, he brought to light how some villages also struggle with physical distancing as living conditions may be comparable in compactness to cities. He highlighted the importance of tapping into the potential of the migrant workers and to view them as entrepreneurs and storehouses of talent as they relocated back to their home towns and villages.

Finally, Dr. Srinivas Shroff spoke about skilling and re-skilling migrant workers. Listing government measures and schemes currently on in India, in order to address their displacement and loss of livelihood, he also spoke about the additional public measures such as linking migrants’ enterprises to e-marketplaces and increasing labor wages under existing government schemes.

Dr. Subhash Hira-Moderator

Key takeaways



- The slide shows different levels of lockdown restrictions in different countries represented by blue, pink, or red halos. Quadrant 1 where Vietnam and other countries show blue halo, meaning low restrictions. In Quadrant 2, India is seen with blue halo i.e. low restrictions, South Africa with pink halo i.e. moderate restrictions, and Argentina with red halo i.e. severe lockdown restrictions.
- The quadrants are made up by vertical axis representing economic outcomes using GDP and industrial/agricultural production indicators, and horizontal axis shows Public Health (PH) outcomes using number of COVID cases detected, fatality rate, and social outcomes. The slide is a pictorial representation of socio-economic outcomes of COVID-19.
- Quadrant 1 is characterized by high economic and high Public Health outcomes. The countries include China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Indonesia, where low to moderate lockdown restrictions were used.
- Quadrant 2 shows low economic but high PH outcomes, including India, South Africa, Germany, Australia, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan. Low to high lockdown restrictions were used.
- Quadrant 3 displays low economic and low PH outcomes. All big economies such as the USA, UK, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Iran are included. Moderate to high lockdown restrictions were instituted.
- Quadrant 4 has high economic but worse PH outcomes, including majority of EU countries. Here, there were moderate restriction, pictured with the pink halo.
- **Thus, we can infer that Quadrant 1 countries got the best socio-economic outcomes, and Quadrant 3 countries got the worst socio-economic outcomes.**

Dr. Swati Maheshwari

Key takeaways

- COVID-19 is pushing about 40-60 million people into extreme poverty (less than \$1.90 per day) in Southern countries of the world.
- IMF projects that in 2020 - advanced economies will contract by around 6% while emerging markets & developing economies will contract by 1%.
- In terms of migrants, UN estimates that nearly 30 percent of the workforce in highly affected sectors in 37 Organization of Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD) countries is foreign-born. Negative effects of job loss is significant for both internal & International migrant workers, as they often work in informal jobs and lack of safety nets in case of job loss or illness.
- The magnitude of internal migration is about two-and-a-half times that of international migration. Migration due to COVID from major metro cities has given rise to a shortage of non-technical workers working in the energy industry and manufacturing units. Moreover, COVID-19 has disrupted education of nearly 1.6 billion learners or 90% of the world's student population. **The pandemic is reversing the progress made towards SDG 4 and as a consequence of this the global aid and spending on education will be negatively affected.**
- Children are disproportionately facing the brunt of the pandemic. Missing out on life-saving vaccinations and disrupted general medical care, they are at heightened risk to pneumonia, diarrheal diseases, malaria, tuberculosis, HIV and other preventable diseases. Many children are deprived of nutritious meals previously provided by schools and care programs.
- **Children are also at increased risk of violence, including mistreatment, gender-based violence, exploitation, social exclusion. Eight in 10 children from 1 to 14 years were subjected to some form of psychological aggression and/or physical punishment at home by caregivers in the past month.** Childline, India helpline received more than 92,000 SOS calls asking for protection from abuse and violence in 11 days of lockdown.
- **The pandemic is affecting women and gender in manifold ways. The gender equality gap is further widening, and women's safety, protection, and their economic independence is being severely hampered. There are 740 million women globally in informal employment whose economic independence is now being hampered due to COVID.**
- Women healthcare workers, who comprise 70% of the global health care workforce, are at a higher risk of infection being at the forefront of the crisis. There is a strong correlation between the public health crisis and violence against women. UNFPA estimated 21 million more domestic violence if the lockdown continued for another 6 months. Pressure on hospitals has interrupted access to other disease control programs such as the HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and sexual and reproductive health services, which is jeopardizing progress on maternal health and SDGs.
- The elderly and disabled grapple with isolation and higher risk of infection and death from Covid-19. More than 95% mortalities till date are persons above 60 years. Being more at risk, they face heightened social stigma and denial of support.

Mr. Anish Kumar

Key takeaways

- The economic re-setting is important as now the goalpost has shifted from fighting corona to living with corona. The dominant source of income in rural India is manual labor; with 50% of the households dependent on it. Only 30% of households have reported cultivation as a source of income in the socio-economic census. Almost 60% of agriculture is rain-fed, which is risky and unpredictable.
- **According to a study conducted by CSDS in 2018, 61% of farm families reported that they would prefer to be employed in cities. Seventy six percent of farmers would prefer to be employed in occupations other than farming.**
- The 10 crore job card holders have barely gotten 37 days of guaranteed work from the 100 days promised to them. This is data extracted from 55 million households. This is the economic distress that informal laborers are now facing.
- **Low population density is being considered a saving grace for rural areas in terms of limiting infection spread. This however is not true for the entirety of rural landscape. In Bundelkhand, 6-7 families live under the same roof just like the Mumbai *chawls* without any infrastructure for handwashing.**
- The procedure for quarantining in villages is largely left to the gram panchayats. Years of neglect of public health are being challenged, which lockdown alone will not be able to address.
- Half of the households in rural areas have reduced the number of meals as a coping strategy. 68% have reduced food on the plate, even though large part of these households had access to public distribution systems. We are looking at a serious nutritional challenge.
- Government of Bihar is talking about 3 million migrants returning back to the state. This is covering 1.8 million households almost. The number of persons inside the household will increase as these migrants are returning from the cities. Not only will this result in overcrowding, but also increased social tensions. Remittance has also stopped, which affects 55% of the rural households. It is uncertain as to when they return to the cities, will there be work left for them?
- In the last 10 years, 271 million people have emerged out of the poverty line. This was combined with 35 million people moving out of agriculture. But the COVID pandemic will severely affect this progress made.
- **We will see in this time of COVID, inequality at an unprecedented scale.**
- **The returning migrant is a pool of entrepreneurial talent. They are risk-takers, living in the margins of cities and not dependent on dollouts. Can we tap into this talent pool with reskilling programs aimed at their transformation into entrepreneurs?**
- **According to studies, if the entire agricultural output production was to be organized the way it has been done in the US, only 40 lakh farmers would suffice for the entire output that India would need. While that would be unsustainable ecologically and otherwise, it throws light on the opportunities and scope for partnerships.** What has not been possible in the last seven decades, the current scenario may offer opportunity to redesign the rural economy.

Dr. Srinivas Shroff

Key takeaways

- Migrant workers managed to largely stay put in cities throughout Lockdown phases 1, 2, and 3. They started returning to their homes in villages only in the fourth phase. There are 139 million migrant workers in India, majority of who emerge from 4 states: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. Mumbai and Delhi are major destinations where workers seek employment, primarily as daily-wagers in manufacturing and construction. They face limited or inadequate healthcare, nutrition, housing, and sanitation that can be scaled-up, especially the use of tele-consultations of expert doctors and counselors connected with district and community hospitals.
 - **The One Nation One Ration Card will benefit migrant workers. Increased allocation to MNREGA and increasing daily wage from Rs.182 to Rs. 202/day (10% raise) can also benefit workers. Government is setting up quarantine facility in district headquarters before migrants can reach their villages.** Migrant commission named Kamgar/Shramik Kalyan Aayog will help labourers. This will be instituted through partnership with FICCI and other industry associations.
 - **While the present skills of displaced laborers continue to get tracked, opportunities must also be simultaneously mapped. Labor must be reskilled to fine tune them for local construction, infrastructure, provide implements as one-time capital support.** Skill displaced laborers can be trained on value-added agriculture and food production. Another way to support migrant workers is to treat their enterprises as start-ups and link it up with Government e-Marketplaces.
 - The 300,000 Common Service Centers across the country can be used to create awareness, provide services and train people. National Skills Development Corporation of India and their accredited agencies must contribute to skilling and reskilling of migrants.
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