Voices From Margins
COVID-19 Pandemic Webinar Series

PRAXIS

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Guidelines for citation: Voices From Margins: Covid-19 Pandemic Webinar Series, India, Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices, 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge the support of the Praxis, Partners in Change, National Alliance Group for De-notified and Nomadic Tribes, Vaanavil Research Collective and Krishnagiri Development Programme Teams for organising and supporting 39 editions in the Voices From Margins: COVID-19 Pandemic Webinar Series.

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PREFACE

On March 24, 2020, the Government of India announced a 21-day nation-wide lockdown to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The next few weeks saw a monumental human tragedy unfold. Factories, markets, malls, construction sites, everything was shut down, closing avenues for livelihoods. Daily wage and informal workers were left in the lurch, with no jobs, no money, depleting savings where available, and uncertainties that nobody seemed accountable for. Thousands of migrants were forced to return home on foot and by hastily arranged transport at great risk. They went in the hope that the villages and towns that they left in search of opportunities in the first place would cushion this unexpected blow. News of people falling dead by the wayside, succumbing to accidents, being exposed to violence motivated by bigoted and uninformed opinion peddled by sectarian sources highlighted the disproportionate impact of a seemingly indiscriminate disease.

The Central and State Governments made attempts to mitigate the unfolding tragedy through schemes related to food, livelihood and cash transfers, including special programmes for farmers and workers. With the lockdown being extended through several months, these schemes proved to offer some succour. Good samaritans, civil society, trade unions, activists, religious institutions supplement the efforts, mobilising basic needs such as food and healthcare. One thing was clear - some communities and groups, excluded by caste, tribe, migrant status, and dependence on informal and daily-wage livelihood were more affected than others. From being unable to access relief when they

needed it most to having decades of progress set back by a few months of lockdown, these groups suffered the double blow of the pandemic and systemic injustices which placed them at the margins. The impact of blow was further exacerbated by gender, age and ability. Community-led organisations (CLOs) and other civil society groups, which have traditionally supported these communities to access basic rights and entitlements, were left high and dry with the withdrawal and diversion of funds towards COVID-relief.

Through its quickly put-together relief efforts, Praxis realised the need to create platforms where the communities could be heard so that basic human rights would not be blurred by relief and charity. If there was going to be a 'new normal', it had to be a more equitable one. It had to be one where the most marginalised voices would contribute to ensure that a pandemic does not dilute decades of people's struggles. It also had to be one where structural barriers to rights would be challenged.

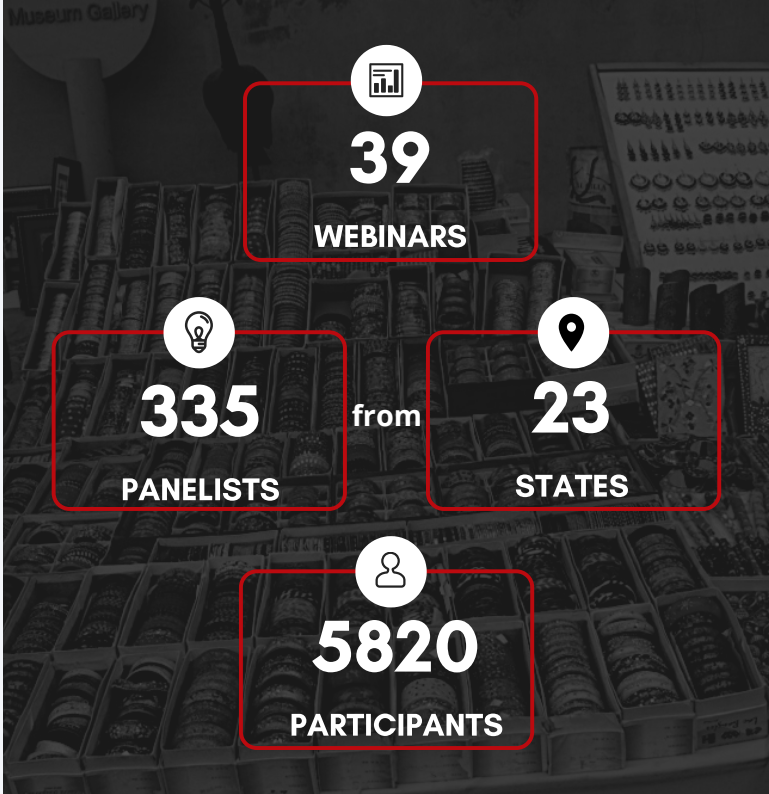
The webinar series aimed to hear the ground-level realities of communities, identify the reach of the schemes announced by the government and collectively explore ways of addressing gaps, if any. The 38 webinars, hosted with support from organisations across the country, brought panelists from a range of communities to the forum. They included denotified and nomadic tribes, Dalits, Muslims and adivasis, which included children with disability, homeless persons, sex workers, gig economy workers, plantation workers, grassroots activists, mediapersons, farmers, among many others. The webinars were also a forum to share findings of rapid surveys that documented how those on the margins were

able to access their entitlements as well as explore ways of reviving community-based systems and ground-level accountability mechanisms. In this, the webinars aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals' principle of 'Leave No One Behind'.

This effort would not have been possible without the support of every panelist in each of these webinars, the audience that made the discussions participatory and the partner organisations that have collaborated with us, expressing their trust in the series and their commitment to making voices from margins heard. We thank each one of you for being part of this journey.

TOM THOMAS
Chief Executive

SNAPSHOT OF VOICES FROM MARGINS COVID-19 WEBINAR SERIES



39
WEBINARS

335
PANELISTS

from

23
STATES

5820
PARTICIPANTS

MARGINALISED BY SOCIAL IDENTITY

Key groups in focus due to marginalisation because of their social identity included dalits, denotified tribes and minorities.

A series of webinars was organised with denotified tribes, including with those from the Madari, Od, Kal Oddar, Van Gujjar and Gadia Lohar on their struggle for survival, with the Nat, Bediya and Bacchara communities on the intersectionality of gender, stigmatisation, migration and caste, with agricultural and migrant workers from the Sabar communitiy and experiences of the Chhara, Bediya and Nat communities as well as activists hailing from and working with denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic groups on the fear of lockup and the situation during the lockdown.

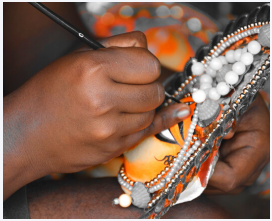
In the context of the Dalit community, we heard from a range of frontline workers who shared insights on the continued stigma

and discrimination that they face from wider society, despite performing several crucial functions during the lockdown. Dalit entrepreneurs shared their status, challenges and opportunities prior to the pandemic and the impact and consequences during the lockdown. One of the webinars also brought to the fore some significant perspectives on caste and the linkages to the control over Dalit women's bodies and lives.

Panelists from tribal communities, including some entrepreneurs from tribal areas shared details about their lockdown related challenges espeically in accessing rights and entitlements.

We also heard from Muslim panelists and their experiences of the lockdown. The initial media frenzy depicting the Tablighi Jamaat event as a super-spreader had far-reaching consequences on the access to rights and entitlements by the Muslims across the country.

De-notified and Nomadic Tribes



Dakxin Bajrange, Filmmaker, Gujarat

"India is home to close to 60 million 'born criminals' who, to this date, face social boycott, legal harassment, atrocities and are forced to live an undignified life. The Nomadic way of life was their livelihood – so called 'development' & 'technological advancement' meant that they were forced to change. The lockdown has pushed these Tribes to the brink, it is now a matter of survival. Not only are their livelihoods impacted, the futures remain uncertain for many artists, dancers, singers, cattle grazers, street performers and sex workers."

"Lack of ration cards and harassment and ill treatment because of their denotified tribe identity have meant that many of the workers have not been able to access government entitlements such as free LPG or any of the relief schemes.

Md. Kalam, Head of Sambhawana Welfare Society, Bihar

The pandemic has added to the already existing hardships and stigmatisation faced by the community in terms of access to limited source of livelihood as well as access to several government schemes and relief packages. Not having legal documents has further pushed the community to vulnerabilities during such crises because access to relief was initially linked to identity documents. Similarly, migrants were forced to go back to their hometowns where they have no alternative source of livelihood, which is mainly due to the stigma that exists against the community. This has left them unemployed, pushing them to indebtedness.

Dr Yogendra, Head, TANDA - Towards Advocacy, Networking and Developmental Action

"The criminalisation and stigma faced by this community, has resulted in malnutrition, high rates of infant and maternal mortality, low birth weight of babies, etc. as access to food and healthcare has been difficult. Traditional practices such as early marriage and early motherhood have further affected the health of young girls and women. It is important that the government provide nutritious food, mobile healthcare units and focus on the needs of marginalized communities. A decentralized healthcare system is imperative and there should be universal healthcare coverage."

"We are seeing the third phase of the lockdown and many of the women who are entertainment workers and performers are stuck in different parts of the country without any help. Many have given birth in the last 3 months but they have been without any medical support or nutritious food. In addition to this, they have had to face violence in many forms, including domestic violence."

Pallavi Renke, Advocate and National Coordinator, Lokdhara

Dalits

Ram Naresh Ram, an Entrepreneur from Palamau district of Jharkhand shared, "I applied for a loan at the District Development Office which was approved and forwarded to NABARD (National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development), who then directed me to the local State Bank of India branch. The officers at the bank asked me my caste. I told them that I belong to the Ravidas community and shared that I was seeking a loan for Rs. 10 lakh. An officer retorted "Who allowed you to have such big dreams?"

Ponnuchamy, State Coordinator of TLRF and Founder of Anal Folk-Art Troupe

This pervasive attitude resonates across several narrations by persons hailing from Dalit communities across the country. "Whether it is COVID or not, Dalits in general, fail in becoming entrepreneurs due to the hurdles they face. 64% don't get the right information to apply for funds. Most of the time their application was rejected stating the documents were not right. By rejecting, they also eliminate the benefits of the scheme in reaching people who need these the most".

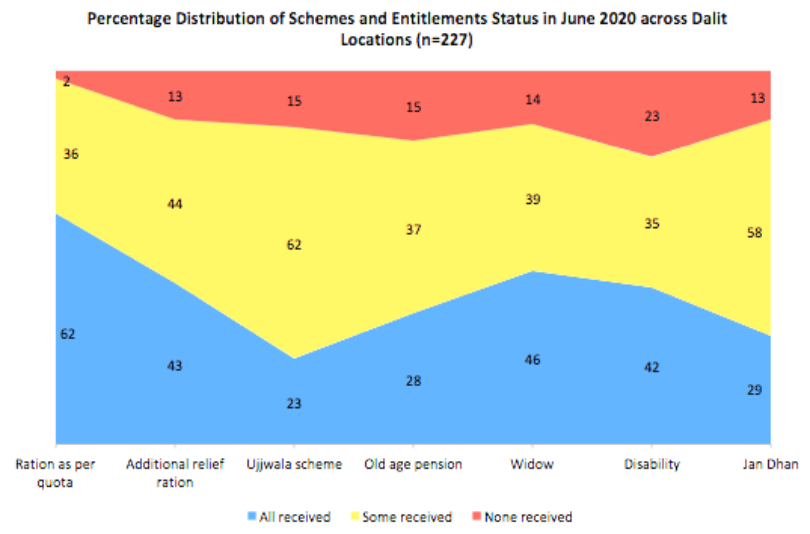
Dalit women are at a double disadvantage with the added burden of gender discrimination to their caste identity. As Priyanka Samy mentioned "We dalit women express our rage and anger with how our human rights are blatantly violated in life and in death. We condemn the systematic and targeted violence against women from our community. And condemn the increasing weaponisation of our access to justice by the powers that be"

Shobana Smriti, All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch

"The situation of Dalit community is worrisome. Since the very beginning discrimination on the basis of caste and profession has always been present. Crimes have been taking place in different locations of India wherein young Dalit girls are targeted. The attitude of the police when it comes to reporting of such crimes further pushes this community towards fear and vulnerability"

"Intersecting discrimination needs to be deconstructed in order to comprehensively address fractured narratives on inequality. It is critical to prioritise gender-responsive planning, budgeting and implementation through the lens of intersectionality. However, just increasing budgetary allocations alone is not enough - policies and budgets need to be responsive and interventions they fund need to be accessible and appropriate to the needs of marginalized communities. Dalit women are invisible in the policy and budgetary discourse of this country. Key issues such as their access to justice, medico-legal services, protection, redressal mechanisms are highly under- funded - highlighting that Dalit lives don't matter".

Priyanka Samy, NFDW



The chart above details the distribution of COVID-19 relief entitlements in Dalit communities from 227 urban and rural locations across 39 districts from 10 states in India as reported in June 2020

"Though the Government is claiming that everyone got ration there are many Dalit families who are discriminated against and did not receive any ration. We are documenting and looking at the experience faced by Dalit community and trying to link and present them to officials, so that we can improve their situation.

- *Reported from Bundelkhand, Uttar Pradesh*

"I stopped working in a garment factory and started my own garment business along with four women. I was denied a TADCO loan because I am a Dalit woman and I had to borrow loans from microfinance. Even though there was no work or income during the lockdown we were forced to pay interest for the loans borrowed."

- *Jothimani, Dalit woman entrepreneur from Erode*

"We got pulses only once between April and June. People also did not receive dry rations. Another huge problem is that we have to wait at the rations shops all day, queuing up from early in the morning just to collect whatever little ration we get, exposing ourselves to so many risks"

- *Reported from Bhargarh Odisha*

"Once our identity is known ration distributors create issues by giving us less than what we are supposed to get"

-*Reported from Maitha Block, Uttar Pradesh*

Ponnuchamy, State Coordinator of TLRF and Founder of Anal Folk-Art Troupe

"During this Covid-19 time, Dalits have been targeted. Many Dalit hamlets have been stigmatised and it has been said that most of them might be infected with this virus and they need to get tested. This is because we have been pushed to work as manual scavengers during this time. We were given Rs 300 - Rs. 400 and given heavy work. Men were called after 8 in the night and had to work till 2 in the morning. Women were targeted to segregate waste in the morning. These are the means that were used to target Dalit villages."

Data from the 227 dalit hamlets across the country shows that entitlements and services are available and accessible largely to those from more advantageous and dominant social and economic backgrounds or to those among the dalit locations with the power to demand. This inevitably excludes the most vulnerable people within the Dalit communities. There are several reasons why deserving families are unable to demand services and entitlements and these include lack of information, fear of approaching service providers due to impending discrimination, corruption, bribery and may others. The schemes are designed with the intention of bringing about justice and protection of rights of the most deserving (marginalised and vulnerable) families. But there have been reports systemic negligence in the administration of schemes and delivery of pandemic mitigation services.

Adivasis

India has the largest tribal population in the world with 573 communities recognised by the government as Scheduled Tribes and therefore eligible to receive special benefits and to compete for reserved seats in legislatures and schools. Due to their remoteness and lack of resources among tribal communities they are among those marginalised communities who have been most disproportionately vulnerable to the impact of COVID19.

"Though Government is claiming that everyone got ration there are many tribal families find difficult to even be intimated about ration, let alone get it. Even though we started getting informed about ration relief by social media, still many families haven't received it. We filed applications, reached out to the helpline for availing of rations and action was taken against the concerned officers."

– Reported from Narmada district, Gujarat

"Not everyone has Jan Dhan account in these areas. There was also confusion if the account is considered as zero balance account or not. Some of them have received money in their accounts twice initially and after that banks are asking them to pay 500 to reopen their accounts as they are blocked already."

- Reported from Sundergarh district, Odisha

Veronica Dung Dung, Secretary, Samajik Seva Sadan

"There are many tribal families that do not have any access to gas cylinders. While some received cylinders under the Ujwala scheme, they have not got a refill. Most tribal villages are in remote locations away from the towns or other villages, making it difficult for them to access schemes. A large number of families also prefer using the traditional chulha to save money. The government must improve their outreach to tribal groups."

"The concept of taking an institutional loan from public institutions is possible mostly to those people who live close to the sub divisionand know about technicalities of taking loan. There are certain areas like Seranda Latehaar, Mahua wherein taking bank or government a loan is like a dream for people. They are largely dependent on local moneylenders for taking loan for health emergencies and marriage purposes. In past three months, our livelihoods have suffered and people have been taking loans for personal purposes with increasing interest and people are being subjected to many undue pressures"

- James Herenj, Jharkhand

Religious Minorities

Muslims are among those marginalised communities that have been most disproportionately vulnerable to the impact of COVID 19 due to incidents in the early days of the first lockdown. Forming a bulk of the informal workforce, they have been hit hard by the lockdown with joblessness, loss of wages, as well as difficulty in accessing relief.

Shahroz Fatima from Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh

"Muslim community does not have access to block or district level and hence they are not able to get documents. - we can see only 50% beneficiary gain the benefits of PDS. Pension we get only twice a year clubbed together. In Hospitals or primary health centres, women face very bad behaviour. No vaccination or medicine is provided. Neither was counselling. And during quarantine, they were additionally discriminated against".

During this COVID 19 time, Muslims have been targeted. Specifically, after the Tablighi Jamaat incident and the vicious media campaign, many Muslims have faced discrimination. They have been stigmatized and it has been said that most of them might be infected with this virus and they need to get tested. Muslim vegetable vendors were also boycotted. Many of them started depending on informal loans".

- Reported from Ahmedabad, Gujarat

"Societies in Mathura, Jhansi, Bareilly, Aligarh and Chitakoot were up with boards no Muslim vendors allowed".

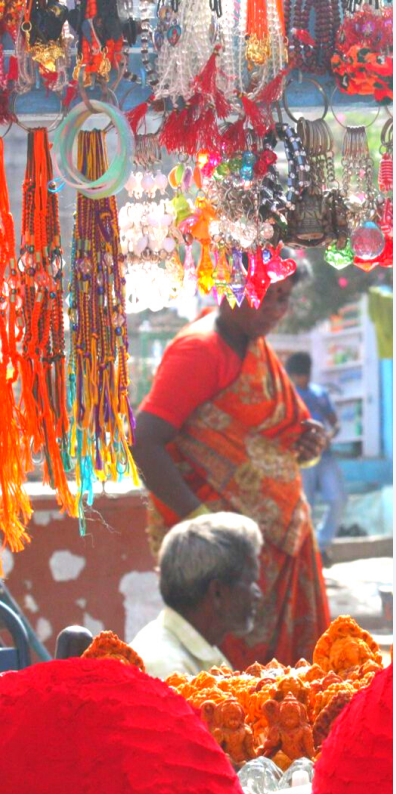
- Reported from Uttar Pradesh

"There is a sense of fear and insecurity in the community, in the prevalent political context, whether they are safe or not."

-Reported from Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat

"Access to Ujjwala scheme has been difficult because of agents who charged money for cylinders. Dalit and Muslims groups, who do not have nexus, find it difficult to get cylinders as and when they need."

-Reported from Chitrakoot and Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh



MARGINALISED BY AGE, GENDER, ABILITY, PLACE OF RESIDENCE

Children from across different urban, peri urban and rural areas across the country, emphasised their lack of agency as they shared experiences of marginalisation and disadvantage due to their age. Adolescents spoke about their lockdown linked experiences and how these impacted access to education, social networks and other aspects of their lives and heightened certain risks due to their age related vulnerability. Child workers and children vulnerable to trafficking talked about their key issues and girls also emphasised the looming threats of child marriage due to the lockdown. Children with disability and their caregivers also shared the challenges that the pandemic and lockdown had on their lives.

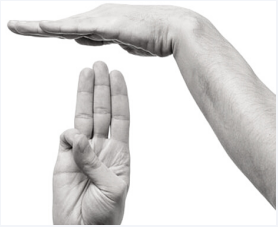
LGBTQI+ individuals shared lessons and insights from the HIV Pandemic and how those could be leveraged in addressing the

current pandemic as well. Several transgender persons and activists reiterated the continued stigma and the discrimination that transgender persons face from wider society. With most transgender persons dependant on daily wages, them already paying much higher rents than cis persons and not having access to identity cards, they shared how the pandemic exacerbated many of these issues.

In the context of those disadvantaged by their place of residence, we heard from several homeless persons living across urban centres in the country who reminded the listeners that the term 'stay at home' took on a new meaning for those who had no physical place to stay in.

Migrants from Manipur living in other parts of the country as well as workers from the state shared their varied lockdown experiences including discrimination that they faced because they hailed form the North East. We also heard from activists and organisations that that work closely with refugees across the country.

Persons with disability



From early March 2020, when the coronavirus reached pandemic status and the media started reporting it, there was recognition that persons with disability may be impacted more significantly by COVID-19 for a range of reasons. This included the higher risk of infection and the additional pressure on caregivers thereby skewing the already existing health inequities. In addition, the lack of physical activities has lead to difficulties for children, especially with intellectual disabilities, as they find it monotonous and constricting to be cooped up inside their homes all the time. Accessing essential medicines for the children was also challenging due to the lockdown. Children with auditory disabilities reported facing problems because their parents were unable to repair their hearing aids and some shared that they were unable to use their equipment due to unavailability of battery during the country-wide lockdown.

Of 56 children with auditory and intellectual disability between the ages of 7 and 15 who were interviewed via telephone in April 2020, only one in four or five families has received any ration since 17

March when the lockdown was announced and even though 10 children with intellectual disability are entitled for disability allowance; none of them had received money from the Maharashtra government.

Danish, is in the secondary class and is appearing for the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) Open Basic Education (OBE) exam "I like doing activity based things. I have made some crafts bags using newspapers, also decorated them. I get bored at home. I like to play football and basketball. My mother does not allow me to go out. I am waiting for the school to reopen to join my studies."

"I am not at all happy. I want to go out but even schools are closed. I am not able to meet any of my friends. I talk to them on the phone but I don't like to sit at home."

– Ayushman, 16

"A longer period of lockdown will result in a major learning loss for children with disabilities who have been availing of speech therapy, hearing therapy and physiotherapy. Bridging the gap of this learning loss will be a big challenge for educational and health institutions which work with such children. Even the general health services have been halted and are difficult to access for them. The adverse impacts will be longer in the absence of no contact with school, no access to therapies and this loss of learning will have long lasting impact upon children much beyond the lockdown period as well"

– Farida Bagasrawala, Save the Children India

Adolescent Girls

The lockdown period created a sense of restlessness and isolation among adolescent girls and boys as their daily routine had come to a sudden standstill. The lockdown was a period that accentuated patriarchal mindsets within families and existing gender divides when it came to decision making related to limited availability of food, access to technology and other household chores. Additionally, sexual and reproductive health was impacted as access to sanitary napkins was difficult due to the restrictions imposed during the lockdown.

Karthika, Ayyapatti Dindigul

"Since the lockdown adolescent girls have been facing several health issues as their food intake has been reduced. The access to food has been only through the free ration provided in the communities by the Government. With the consistent intake of just rice the adolescent girls have been facing multiple health issues as there is no nutritional value, leaving them malnourished."

"I attained puberty during the lockdown and faced a lot of problems because of it. I had no supply of free sanitary napkins and had to resort to using old cloths. I had to call the ASHA worker, who then helped me with my doubts on how to prepare the cloth pads. But this was not enough, since I still faced many issues. I had allergies, infections and abdominal pain. I had to get a check-up in a clinic. This was not just the case with me, there were 8 other girls in my village who faced similar problems."

- Shwetha (name changed) from Solliyapuram village in Krishnagiri district of Tamil Nadu

"There is no stable source of income, savings to survive. In this sort of situation where financial tension, food relate issues are more in consideration, for a girl it is worrisome to think of her future studies or whether she'll be able to continue with it at all, or how her tuition fees would be paid. In rural areas like ours, child marriage or child labour is normalised. When the lockdown will be lifted, it will increase more in numbers. During this time, marriages are being fixed and there is a chance of not having antecedents of grooms checked. This can also lead to girls being trafficked on the pretext of marriage.

- Jayashree Mondal, Panchgraha village, South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal

"Now, during the time of Coronavirus, schools are closed. Because of lockdown and the Amphan cyclone, many people have lost their houses. Schools, colleges and educational institutes have all closed down. As a result, children are facing a lot of problems - both physically and mentally. They are witnessing quarrels within their own houses. Children are not able to go out and meet others and that is also causing mental health issues."

- Mala, an ASHA worker, and an active member of the Village Child Protection Committee, West Bengal.

The most extensively talked about issue was the lack of access to phones for online education. Prevailing gender norms limit the access of girls to smartphones with the far reaching potential impact of permanent drop out of the girls from schools.

"Even in the case of rural areas, due to the existing discriminatory practices and gendered perceptions, girls do not have access to phones. The lack of mobiles phones and in addition to that the fear of elopement or the girls talking to boys, girls are unable to access e-classes. Online classes have further limited the scope of clarifications and discussions for children in rural areas."

- Anu, Barauli village in Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh

"A pair of siblings come home to take tuitions from me. The brother doesn't let his elder sister use the mobile saying that his father has given it to him and not to her. Marriage is taking precedence over the education of girls and many parents are willing to marry off their daughters during the lockdown. Parents consider the lockdown to be the best time to get their girls married because it would cut down the costs of treating guests and the dowry is less. There is a very high probability of girls getting married and dropping out of school permanently. Usually girls are married off after Class 10-12, but now they might get married even younger."

- Moni, Anupshehr village in Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh

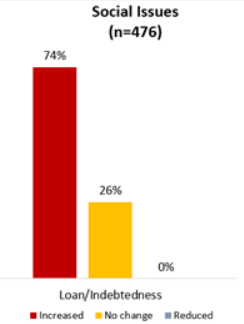
Child Workers & Children Vulnerable to Trafficking

Given the lack of stable livelihood options, many have been forced to take loans and high levels of indebtedness have been reported from across geographies beginning as early as March itself. Household moneylending prevalence has increased for accessing food and other basic provisions.

"When I was younger, a dalal (middleman) approached us from a nearby village and nearly 6-7 boys were given an advance of Rs 2000. We were promised proper stay facilities and time to pursue our education, because of which we agreed to go with him to work in a bangle factory in Jaipur. When we arrived we found that we all had to live in one small room. We had to work from 6 am to midnight, during which we would only get tea to drink. At lunch if we wanted a little extra portion we were not allowed

that. We were promised education and other benefits, but it was all a lie."

-Ashish Kumar, 17 years old, from Gaya, Bihar



Data collected from 476 locations across India via the COLLECT initiative revealed that 74% of the locations reported an increase in loans between April and June. Loans are often taken from employers, money lenders, neighbours and relatives and as indebtedness has always been a trigger for other social and economic exploitation, there is also a concern regarding increase in the incidents of trafficking of children as they are more vulnerable to exploitation during such times.

Child garment workers shared that in the course of their regular employment, no safety measures are undertaken nor was any safety equipment provided to the workers. Due to this, the workers face several health issues such as blood Pressure, skin infections and allergies, and are prone to accidents. Gender disparity exists in mills where both boys and girls working in the same unit would not be paid equal wages and children are forced to work for a longer than eight hours.

The lunch break offered to us is only for 5 minutes and the Rs 5 per person given for buying food from the canteen is not sufficient. In our village adolescent girls cannot continue their education after Class 8 as there are no high schools present in the village. After the lockdown was announced, wages were only paid for 19 days for March, no wages were paid for April. Work began from the 11th of May and we have received Rs 2000 as an advance, which is to be adjusted against our salaries. Most of the youngsters and women present in my village are working in the mills and like me they have had to face many struggles during the lockdown."

- M. Gomathi Subha, 16 years, Garment Worker, Dindigul, Tamil Nadu

"The free ration we received did not suffice and we further borrowed provision from our neighbours. After the lockdown as many families would be unable to generate any income, they would be willing to send their adolescent girls for mill work. Many mills have been offering job opportunities for adolescent girls with hostel facilities. If adolescent girls go for mill work, they might end up as child labourers or there are high chances for child marriages."

- Bhavani, Adolescent girl from Kurumbapatti, Dindigul, Tamil Nadu

The pandemic has once again brought to light the urgent need for the Government to focus on strong institutions, proper education systems, ensuing safety, security and overall development of children. A lack of support or means for livelihood could also have an impact on school dropout and lead to an increased risk in the incidents of child marriages.

"When I was 14 years old I was sent to Himachal Pradesh by a dalal (middleman), against my will. Somehow, I ran away, freed myself and came back home in April 2019. I feel that what has happened to us should not happen with anyone. But I find that there are many boy in my village who are willing to go to Bhutan for work. There is an agent who takes them. Because of lockdown they are not able to go, but they still they want to go because if they don't earn what will they eat?"

– Subhash, a 16 year old member of the Centre Direct Survivors Group

Rohini Chhari,
Social Activist,
Madhya Pradesh

"There is a high probability of girls from the Bedia community in the age group of 16-18, in the near future, being forced to drop out of school and getting into sex work. The government has not provided any source of alternate or supplement livelihood options for the families. "

Sexual Minorities

Thenmozhi, Transgender Activist, Chennai

"Most organisations only view Transgenders from an HIV lens and focus on HIV supplies, they do not see other challenges of Transgender lives and they do not recognise the talents or skills we might have. For a livelihood, transgenders either go for sex work or get money from shops. With the Rs 300 or 500 that we earn, we would use that to survive the day but this has been difficult after COVID-19 lockdown. No one cares about transgenders now. The people who have supported us during these times are the ones that we are friends with on Facebook or the shop keepers or few religious institutions that have been helping us by giving us ration and other provisions for food."

The conditions of transgender persons worsened drastically during COVID-19 as they faced discrimination and islolation to a greater extent than other communities. The transgender communities in

contact with the NGOs were provided with relief measures but those who weren't, were impacted gravely. In general they have continued to face challenges due to the regressive mindsets of the health care providers. Lack of proper documents of identity proof is one of the major challenges among transgender communities as its absence creates hassles in availing of the benefits of the government.

Priya Babu, Regional Program Manager, SWASTI

"The transgender community does not have a proper ID card and that is one of the biggest issues and to avail any benefits during the lockdown, documents are important however no bills or legislations have been helpful in this context. In the new Transgender Persons Act, for the transgender certification one has to go to the Magistrate. Who is the magistrate to certify us? Self-identification should have been given prominence. There is no community representation and the entire right rests with the Magistrate which by itself is an absolute Human rights violation. The Bill should have been translated into local languages and taken to the community."

The issue with modern society is that it is obsessed with binaries – the status or purview of viewing things only as good-bad, male-female, upper caste-lower caste, married-unmarried and so on. In society we are able to witness the growing emphasis on these binaries, instead of going beyond binaries we seem to be going back to focusing on them. Transgenders as an identity symbolise rebellion against binaries at its very core and we need to be celebrating this diversity, rather than scorning and relegating it."

– Tom Thomas, CEO, Praxis

Yoga Nambiar, Transgender Persons Activist

"Going to doctors is still a big challenge for us – they are unsure of putting us in the male or female ward and not only do the doctors show reluctance in care but the behaviour of the support staff is also dismissive. There are so many incidents of grave medical complications because of delays in treatment to transgender patients. Another largely unaddressed issue is that of high suicide rates among transgender persons as seeking treatment and counselling is a challenge for them".

The government requires trans-persons to submit bank account details for relief benefits. What would people with no accounts do? The practice of untouchability is how Dalits were treated in the society and now it has been emphasized in the form of 'social distancing'. During the lockdown when I sought help, the government questioned me "what is intersex?" I was shifted mandatorily to a government women's shelter due to cold and all the women survivors in the shelter were forced to leave after 15 days. Where would they go after 15 days?"

– Gangabhavani from Telangana

"During COVID-19 inclusion and exclusion aspects in society have become very clear. Transgenders have been completely left out and it is very important to understand why there is so much emphasis on legal documents and papers. There is a need for discussion on problems faced by people due to not having these papers and documents in place. Welfare boards which were doing this are not operating well and they have not received proper support from the government.

– Mona Mishra, Independent Researcher and Activist

Geographically Disadvantaged Communities

"For the past three generations, my family has been living on the roadsides. I work as a helper in tying flowers and earn up to Rs 100-200 per day. We are still living on roadsides without food or proper shelter. We do not only struggle for food, but for all our basic needs. We are beaten and threatened by the police for selling flowers on the streets and several cases were filed against us as we are street dwellers."

Sarasa, living on the roadsides of Parry's Corner, Chennai

Neelavathy, slums in Broadway, Chennai

"During the lockdown accessing public toilets has become a struggle for us. Police prevent us from using the most accessible route to the toilets. Even if it is for elderly people or children, the easiest route is blocked citing lockdown. It is more challenging for menstruating women. There is also much discrimination against us. While our mobility is restricted, the apartment complex nearby has much more freedom ."

There were stringent restrictions by the police on homeless persons during the lockdown, including not allowing them to sit on streets to beg and denying them access to public spaces.

Nandlal,
New Delhi

"Many of us homeless persons were dependent on religious places and alms for survival. After these places have been shut down, we are now abandoned. Those who used to take shelters in religious places like the Bangla Sahib Gurudwara have nothing, not even utensils to cook food in."

People from the North-Eastern states have faced various forms of racism from being called names to being attacked physically. Due to the lockdown many students who came from North East to appear for competitive exams reported being stuck in different cities. They also were being pressured to leave their accommodation and return to their home states.

Sumpi Tonitha, B.A. first year student in Delhi University said, "I came to Delhi a year back and have been a victim of racism multiple times during my stay in Delhi. The most recent one I encountered was when a friend of mine and I went to a park. A bunch of teenagers in school uniform came and said "Corona" pointing at us. We got so angry and asked them why they said so. People think that it is okay to bully people from North East just because we have mongoloid features, just because of how we look. Not only this incident, whenever we go out, people stare at us and say "Corona". They pass crude comments and laugh at us. My friends also cried when people mock at them saying "Chinese Chinese" (accusing us of being virus spreaders)."

“Though racial abuse and discrimination towards people from North East India was prevalent even earlier, it has been on a rise ever since this pandemic situation. To be precise, the victims of racial discrimination are mostly women. Two days back, one Manipuri woman was physically assaulted in Gurgaon just because of her features. I want to simply state that, if North East is about small eyes, then India is simply about small minds.”

– K. Sakpui, Postgraduate student, Ambedkar University

Refugees in India are neither discussed nor visible in either the development sector or media or in any general policies. India’s journey with refugees traces its roots to the Partition of 1947 as it has witnessed a large population shifting into two newly formed countries. Today, India provides shelter to Rohingyas, Bangladeshi refugees including Chakmas and Sri Lankan Tamils.

"The circumstances under which the Roingyas Muslims live makes it difficult to follow the protocols of social distancing and they become more prone to infection. I voluntarily work with these communities. In Chennai, about 80 people who are from 18 families live in a two storied building by making a makeshift demarcation of spaces. Each family lives in a space less than 150 square feet metres. All these families live so closely and there are two toilets which are used by 80 families. Rats can be seen running around. It's all so scary and unsafe from the perspective of health. Women face security issues and children are deprived of the basic facilities. In case one person is affected, the entire group of inmates will be affected". This was echoed by those working with Sri Lankan Tamil refugees as well.

Sakira Banu, volunteer working with Rohingya refugees in Chennai

"Since 21st March all the in-person activities were banned by UNHCR and its partners. Interviews for asylum seekers were rescheduled in July or August from March and the later have been postponed indefinitely. With the rising number of COVID19 cases, there is no clear notice from the UNHCR about resuming its function to full capacity. These interviews are important for the asylum seekers as these are the deciding factors for them if they could issue a refugee card or not and rescheduling of interviews are creating a psychological tension among them and leaving them in uncertainty about their lives."

- Rhuta Deobagkar, Migration & Asylum Project

"The world has witnessed an increase in violence against women during the pandemic. In India refugee women are also affected by the same. The situation is more difficult for them in terms of redress as there is language barrier, lack of awareness of local lawyers and deep rooted fear of authority as well as uncertainty about their legal status. Now the pandemic has made their situation even more severe."

- Rhuta Deobagkar, Migration & Asylum Project

MARGINALISED BY OCCUPATION

During the Covid-19 pandemic, for the first time in a long time, the image of the 'migrant worker' took centre stage. What came to the fore was the informal sector marked by poor working conditions, long hours, low wages and the lack of any social protection or job-security. The increased desperation for livelihoods after the stark loss of jobs due to Covid-19 has the potential to worsen the power equation between the employer and employee. Needless to say, workers, especially those who are part of the informal economy, are among those who have been most disproportionately vulnerable to the impact of COVID-19. They have been hit hard by the unplanned lockdown, with job losses, loss of wages, as well as difficulty in accessing relief. In addition, given this situation, all aspects of their of their lives have been affected and poor access to food, healthcare, proper sanitation and safe sources of loans have all been a cause of concern.

Agricultural and Plantation Workers

Farmers and plantation workers from across the country shared that crops were ready for harvest but the sudden lockdown disrupted all possible ways to transport and sell the produce in markets. The resultant waste and losses to farm labour jobs led to increased indebtedness.

"During 13 days of complete lockdown, the lives of tea garden workers in Dibrugarh were adversely impacted without any wage. They only received Rs 1000 – Rs 500 from the government and Rs 500 from the company. This money was distributed in 50-80 gardens, though not everywhere. The workers had to protest to demand for their wages. As there is no proper facility for pregnant women in the tea gardens, getting treatment for them and other illnesses have been a challenge. Masks have been distributed in the tea gardens just once and the sanitization process has rarely been done."

– Rustom Kujur, Vice-President, All Adivasi Students' Association of Assam

Munni Begum, Jaunpur District, Uttar Pradesh

"Ninety per cent of the Beedi workers in Jaunpur district are women who belong to the Muslim community. These women work a full day to earn wages between Rs 65 and 85 per day. We found that very few of them actually have ration cards or access to other government schemes. These workers have a number of health challenges like back pain, spondylitis and problems in menstruation and uterus due to their working conditions. Their adolescent daughters also support in the work. Most of the men in their families work in cities, they have come back during the lockdown and now have no work in the village. Domestic violence has also increased during this time."

Natural and organic farming, despite their tremendous potential for producing healthy crops that can be immunity boosting, have not got the needed impetus from government in the form of schemes nor subsidy on inputs.

Market distortions have aggravated unsustainable farming and there needs to be a reversal of rural appropriation for sustainable agriculture. "The so-called package deal from the government of re-aggregation has been a failed model of the past, as a result we have farmers everywhere in distress today. With grains in storage and migrants hungry, there is deep-set inhumanism that has crept into governance and that's one of the problematic aspects of what kind of democracy we are. The voices of the farmers were not well articulated by leaders in multiple forums. It was only seen as economically viable, it was never discussed whether it was ecologically viable in inter-generational perspective."

- Leo F. Saldanha, Coordinator, Environment Support Group

Stephen Ekka, Director of Pajhra "Unionisation is allowed in tea plantations and the tea sector claims to have some of the biggest unions, however, most plantation unions are in the hands of the management. This is one key reason why wages had not increased for years. In 2014, the wage was just Rs 84. Many women and student leaders led the Wage andolan (protest), which was started in 2014, and for the first time there was hiked of Rs 47. But even today the wage is lower than minimum wage. A key issue is also the restriction on entry and gatekeeping, particularly of NGO workers or activists and this is against the Fundamental Rights of the workers."

Beed in Maharashtra is one of the famous places for sugarcane workers. The workers here take an advance in November and they migrate to different parts of the state to cut sugarcane. During lockdown these workers were not supported in any way. They were not allowed back inside villages, either.

"We had to intervene and talk to sugarcane factories that should have supported these workers. All these workers have their children and elderly at home. Ideally, factories should take responsibility but they don't. Many workers have sold gold and other forms of jewellery in order to sow seeds for the next season. Whatever they have

borrowed from money lenders can only be returned once the government helps with loans. There is a dire need for crop loans, debt waivers and procurement."

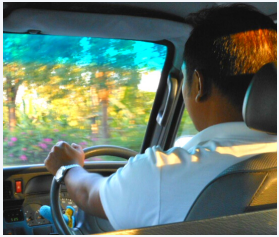
- Gangabishan Tharve is a farmer and has been associated with Shetkari Sangharsh Samiti, Beed, Maharashtra

Bhairab Saini, Organic farmer from Bankura, West Bengal

"Farmers are convinced to go for chemical agriculture under pressure of companies, who motivate them by the promise of profits. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, famers have had to suffer a lot - during the 1.5-2 months of lockdown, they were unable to sell their produce, except in local markets. Many people let their vegetables die on the fields while others were simply plucked and given away."

Kavitha Kuruganti, Alliance for Sustainable & Holistic Agriculture : Our demand is that the three Acts (The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation), the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act) should be annulled. Instead, the two All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee Bills on Freedom from Indebtedness and Guaranteed Remunerative MSP should be passed.

Gig Economy Workers



The Industrial Relations Code is amalgamation of the Trade Union Act, which governs collective bargaining, formation of trade union, etc, the Industrial Employment (Standing Order) Act - which determines who is a worker, work conditions etc, the Industrial Disputes Act which determines when the code applied, to whom, how dispute resolution takes place, rights of workers if factory shuts, etc. The justification for collating these laws into a code came from the Second National Commission's recommendation to club all laws into 4-5 codes, making changes to procedural aspects. But their suggestion of not altering the substantial or core areas was completely ignored.

- Rahul Sapkal, TISS, Mumbai

"For the last 2 months I am facing many challenges, how I will pay EMIs and the school fees for my children. There have been no cab bookings. In the morning we pay Rs 500 for fuel but with no bookings,

how will we live. We don't have money even for food. We have no one who will support us. Drivers are so important for daily activities, without drivers how will daily commuters travel in the city?"

- Suganthi, a cab driver from Bangalore

Shaik Salauddin, National General Secretary, IFAT

"There is no framework that defines the workers of gig economy whether it's independent, temporary, platform or app based workers. Due to the absence of such a framework, it also frees the companies from any obligations. App-based cab aggregators played tricks on workers without maintaining the employer and employee relation. Also, there are no defined working hours and the earnings depend upon how much a person earns. If there would have been some policy, welfare board or regulations in place for the gig economy workers some of their challenges could have been addressed."

"There are many women like me who are driving taxis, managing their studies and also supporting their families by working 12-14 hours. What are the companies and the government doing for drivers? They declared Rs 5000 as compensation but I have not heard of any worker who has received this. Now, the companies have taken back the cars from us on the ground of carrying out some safety related work. Now when we call them no one responds. We don't have any other source of livelihood."

- Ragini Gaur, a cab driver for the last 3 years

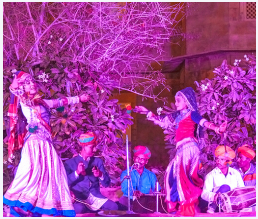
The lack of a standard definition or defining framework in law for gig economy workers leads to misuse and misappropriation by companies. With a communication gap among the departments labour, transport and others, gig economy workers' welfare board is also struggling to address economic challenges during the times of crisis.

Sripal Reddy, Organising Secretary of Telangana Four Wheelers Association Union says that "With buying our own safety equipment, we haven't earned more than Rs. 200 or Rs.300 per day during the lockdown as the company has not provided us with any safety kits. But commission is being charged by the traffic police from us regularly and there is no update about incentive on the app. Even when we called the company, OLA there was no proper response from the authorities".

"Though their advertisements talk about how all the safety measures are being taken and the customer's food is in safe hands but in reality they provide nothing to the workers in the name of safety measures. These companies have managed to collect crores of fund for COVID 19 but they have not given any benefit to their workers. The only reason they have started work so early during the lockdown is so that no one can object that they are not supporting their workers - they can now say that the company is working and it was the workers' 'choice' to sit at home. The companies compel the employers to join irrespective of the condition of employees. We want the government to reduce the commission amount and ensure the workers are given a higher income."

- Dharmendra Vaishnav, Joint Secretary, Indian Federation of App Based Transport Workers

Entertainment Industry Workers



Denotified tribes have led a marginalised existence for decades. The Nat, Bediya, Kanjar and the Bachhra communities were historically performers engaged in singing and dancing as folk artists during the rule of monarchy in India. After the end of monarchy and change in the laws of the state these communities with no other source for income, sex work gradually became their primary source of livelihood, a 'traditional' occupation. The DNT communities consider sex work as a culturally and socially accepted form of earning or livelihood, but the stigma attached to the profession has stigmatised the entire community. Besides these traditional sex workers, other sex workers are also fighting a battle against patriarchy, legal criminalisation and moralistic views that try to ban sex work by accusing the women workers of being super spreaders. .

"The police and the legal system do not extend to the sex workers community. The reaction of the legal system and the police is different when it comes to any cases related to sex workers. The police do not accept the case or provide charges against the person because as we are sex workers, they are pre-

determined that it would be our mistake. We have been stigmatised and mentally abused by their words".

- Geethanjali, Joint Secretary of All India Network of Sex Workers

Twinkle Khatoon, Nat community, Forbesganj, Bihar

My community has a large number of single mothers, who have a whole family dependent on their earnings. These women are sex workers and their situation was particularly bad during the lockdown as their work had come to a standstill. Most of them do not have ration cards or MNREGA job cards, which made it even more difficult during this time. They have no support during this time and are extremely worried about where they will get their next meal from."

"Women from the Bedia community are involved in entertainment performances in many cities. Their families, even in the villages, are dependent on them. If they are brought back home, what work will they do? Do we have any alternative or supplementary work available for them here? They are sex workers, dancers, singers and performers. We need to think about the women in the big cities as well as their families back home in the small towns and villages," said Rohini Chhari from Madhya Pradesh.

Nalini Jameela, Author, Kerala

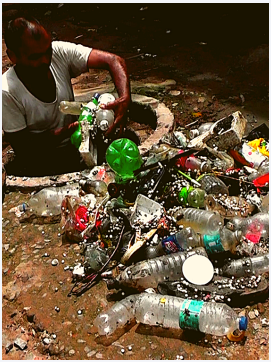
"In Kerala, there has been no such change in experience of stigmatization during COVID-19 pandemic because there are no brothels. In other places with brothels, stigma against sex workers has increased because sex workers are thought of as unwanted and at the lowest rung of society. They are held responsible even by the government. But they should learn from us that top-down restrictions will not work. "

Health Sector Workers: Sanitation, Mortuary and Hospital workers

With occupations being caste-based, all the rights of sanitation workers defined under the labour laws are violated. Though sanitation and mortuary workers are engaged in hazardous work – physical, chemical and biological – the government has not supported such workers with extra protection and risk-cover.

"Manual scavenging takes a toll on the health of the workers. I used to remove animal carcassas from homes; skin them and sell them but I left this job two to three years ago. I also used to clean gutters and septic tanks. Even today manual scavengers are only provided with leftovers and worn out clothes. Most families do not own health benefits or ration cards due to which they do not receive free ration. In addition to this, their children are discriminated against in school."

– Sanjay, Chamari village, Jalaun district, Uttar Pradesh



"Majority of the manual scavengers have been affected adversely due to lockdown as they do not have job cards, ID cards, etc. This hampers them from accessing benefits of government schemes. COVID-19 has brought in the concept of social distancing which has led to further discrimination towards this community."

- Kuldeep, Bundelkhand Dalit Adhikar Manch, Uttar Pradesh.

With the congested living spaces for sanitation workers, physical distancing is nearly impossible and there is a constant fear among families of sanitation workers that they might get the infection. One of the major challenges faced by the sanitation workers during the pandemic has been limited access to safety gear, soaps etc. Additionally they are also not being paid the correct wages, especially those that are on contractual workers.

"We received masks and gloves only once and the masks were damaged while working. Since then we haven't received any alternative kits. The pay we receive is less and no information has been provided about our Provident Fund. It has been a struggle for us to even manage our meals."

- Sanitation workers from Patna

Sumitra (name changed), Sanitation Worker at a hospital in Virudhunagar District, Tamil Nadu shared, "During COVID there was no support for contract workers as they have been working on the same shift timings. We cannot access meals at the hospital because they refuse to provide food for contractual workers. We are unable to afford food as our salary works out to Rs 100 per day after the expenses on bus. If we are offered free fritters or tea, we would have that and continue our 8 hours work".

"Sanitation workers are the most vulnerable group as they are outside while everyone else is safe inside their homes. They are the ones handling human waste, medical waste and garbage. At workplaces workers have been asked to wash their hands every half hour, but what about sanitation workers, where do we expect them to wash their hands? The government has not provided them with the basics like water for drinking. For other essential workers the government has been providing hotels and restaurants, sanitation workers only have the roadsides or ashrams. At least during this pandemic, we must understand that all citizens are equal. Irrespective of what the essential service is, all should be provided with proper wages and dignity. The Central and State governments must create a package for sanitation workers as it is their responsibility to protect them."

– Bezwada Wilson, National Convener, Safai Karmachari Andolan

"During the lockdown we were not able to conduct any community meetings with adolescents because of which we were not able to counsel girls who newly attended puberty. They had no support during the lockdown. We counselled them via phone on how to use old cotton cloth as napkins and clean them. Although we tried our best most girls had reported with health issues and we had to take them to clinics.

This is not only for the girls in the village but also for the migrant adolescents. Most of them are not registered here but they are in need of sanitary napkins. Although we understand that they require napkins we are unable to support them".

- Dominic Mary, ASHA worker, Krishnagiri District

"I work in a mountainous region and the houses here are small and widely dispersed. Habitations are far and each mountain area has only one or two units of families and to communicate with them with phone is not feasible because of both network and affordability issues. During the lockdown we have done house-to-house visits for adolescents' health. We provide them counselling, guide them on how to use sanitary pads and girls themselves also share if they are having any problem and difficulty and we try and provide solutions."

- Lalita Kalal from Udaipur district, Rajasthan, Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) in the sub-centre located in Phalasiya village of Jhadol CD block

NGO Sector Workers

Community-led organisations in the non-profit sector have seen a lot of problems during the lockdown due to funding cuts, lack of new funding and mobility restrictions.

When we talk about the community-based organisations, there are two diverge ends of the spectrum of how they are perceived, particularly by the donors. There are those rooted in the traditional 'user group', who are seen by big funders as delivery services at low cost. The other end is community-led organisations that are not in the in delivery of services but challenging the structure of the service and equality. And, to me, they are like the 73rd or 74th amendment to the NGO sector. They embody the principle of subsidiarity of decision making in both rural and urban areas."

- Tom Thomas, CEO, Praxis

We reached out to 82 organisations, working in 13 states and they employ 8346 people who work in 9394 villages and they have supported 52 lakh community members through direct relief and many times they are also helped to get connected with the appropriate authority or organisations. The big headline is that 83 per cent of these organisations are in fear of the survival for coming six months due to the present condition. We found out that 52 per cent of the organisations had applied for relief through proposals and various means and 28 per cent did not get any fund from anybody for the relief work.

"Organisations face funding issues as proposals are sought in English, which is a big challenge. We have had no commitments for funding so far in this context (lockdown). We can't let go of this community because we have been working with them for 8 years but we don't know how to afford to continue support - this community is already stigmatised by the criminal tribe tag and we are worried if we stop work with them, they will slip back to a level which will be tough to recover from. We are ourselves from the same community and cannot afford to personally contribute so we are unsure what the future holds".

- Lalita Dhanwate asociated with Vaijra Mahila Bahu Udeshiya Samajik Sangathan (VMBUSS)

Laila, Warangal, Telangana. President of MAS

"Initially, after the lockdown as we did not receive any support from donors, and as community leaders we initiated relief support for our members by contributing money from our personal savings. We were only able to support their hunger by providing groceries temporarily but there are issues beyond that. They require support in paying rents, covering medical expenses and supporting families that are dependent on them.

"The biggest challenge is that our organisation works with Muslim community and the religion related stigma and the fake news that was spread made it difficult. We started sending letters to some of the INGOs as the problem of starvation started emerging. In 3 blocks we have almost 15000 families, but we were able to reach out to around 400 families only as we have limited resources. The organisations with which we had linkage did not collaborate with us. Some said they had limited CSR fund. We could not start with fund raising as we do not have enough knowledge about that. We have utilised whatever money was left with us. Now the challenges that remain in front of us include how to keep our staff going and how to continue helping our community."

– *Azhar Ali, Nav Bhartiya Nari Vikash Samiti*

"COVID-19 has brought out faultlines that have always existed. Civil society, especially from grassroots have always responded in times of crisis or natural disasters with whatever resources they had, without complain. Now we find that money is not available where it is most required. The funding process is also so complex that it delays funding. Now is the time to highlight these challenges and not go back to life as usual after this crisis is over. It is important to voice these issues and move forward towards change."

– *Harsh Jaitli, Chief Executive Officer, Voluntary Action Network India*

Journalists

"A major section of the media has forgotten that it is the fourth pillar of democracy. There is reluctance to take up and report on the issues affecting the marginalised and the common man. The renowned journalists are not struggling as they have financial support through brands which enables them to travel for covering any story but this isn't the case with fellow journalists who are community based. There has been so much focus on COVID and healthcare numbers, that any coverage that focuses on the complexities of the issue or the struggles of the marginalised does not find space."

- Sadhika Tiwari, Principal Correspondent, India Spend"

The current scenario of work for freelancers has not only affected the quality of the work ,they also stand to lose livelihood and paycheques. There is building up of anxiety and pressure which comes along with the issues of economic constraints ,little scope for opportunity to work and lack of a support system.

Many remote areas are entirely covered by freelancers and yet they are not given press card and are also not provided by any support system by the organisation."

- Mahima Jain, Independent Journalist

"Journalists travelling to challenging places and hard-to-reach locations for reporting neither have safety measures available nor they are assured of the sustenance of their employment. Media houses didn't pay any heed to this and the journalists too are well aware of this negligence. Journalists who are putting their lives in risk by reporting from the ground during such times should be protected. But there are no mediums or representatives present to put forth these concerns across public platforms. Do we have anyone to raise issues affecting the journalists who report the challenges of others? I was working for Nayi Khabar and the next day I was told it is being shut."

- Nivedita Jha, President of South Asian Women in Media (SAWM), Bihar chapter

"The right-wing of India has weaponized misinformation. People working on the ground are aware of how misinformation has pervaded through all sections of people and its impacts in terms of polarisation. The end goal of the current government is to control independent media. With the whole system trying to ensure the real issues doesn't reach our ears, it is becoming hard and hard to differentiate between fake and reality."

- Pratik Sinha, Co-founder and editor, Alt News

"In India the visual literacy of publications is low and hence they payment is abysmally low in proportion to that of a writer, which is a stark contrast in comparison to European countries or USA. Photo journalists have to be in the middle of the action and cannot afford to work from home. Photo and video journalism in particular require a sense of personal touch and intimacy and connection with the respondents, with COVID precautionary measures in place, this has become very tough as they cannot see my expressions. During this lockdown we have seen many journalists test positive and they still report - shooting hospital spaces and the conditions of the institutions."

- Saumya Khandelwal, Independent Photojournalist

"Fact-Checking is a stringent process, like primary source, led news and strict attribution which should be independent, free from government or corporate pressure. With affordable mobile data plans, more people are coming online for the first time. Many of the lack of media literacy on how to consume news. Misinformation thrives in regional languages away from the scrutiny of the English or Hindi mainstream media. Fact-checkers are predominantly focused on debunking misinformation in these languages. WhatsApp is end-to-encrypted. Anonymity is key to spreading rumours.2018 is defining Year that showed Fake News just doesn't misinform but also kills. Over 35 people have died since 2017. Mobs have lynched innocent on charges of being child-kidnappers."

- Jency Jacob, Managing Editor, BOOM

Garment Sector Workers

Sibija, Vaanavil Research Collective

"The garment supply chain is vast - from cotton farming to stitching and packaging, the making of a ready-made garment involves a diverse range of skilled workers. Before a deeper dive into issues that have arisen due to the pandemic, it is important to look at the varied vulnerabilities that already exist in this sector: cheap and unskilled workforce, minimal pay; payment only made for the days worked; women form a large chunk of this cheap and unskilled labour employed in these factories; gender pay gap; exploitative work culture, employment roles based on the patriarchal norms of the society; employment of young girls through the Sumangali/Thirumagal Scheme; unhealthy working conditions; contractual nature of work and lack of access to schemes and benefits', including ESI and PF."

Chandra, Gethu
Worker-Led Think Tank

"Employees working in mills are unaware of what EPF is. In the rare cases that they do, workers are unaware of how to access EPF details including their UAN, User id, contact number and how much money is contributed towards EPF. Often the EPF accounts of employees are filled in with the details of the mill or organisation and the messages and updates to go these numbers rather than the employee".

"Tamil Nadu is known for hosting an increasing number of interstate migrants in the garments and textile industry. These migrants are majorly from the states of Odisa, Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and other parts of South India. These interstate migrants form the supply chain for Erode, Salem, Karur, Coimbatore, Namakkal, Dindigul and Tirupur, the seven districts that form the textile hub. Tamil Nadu has registered under industries and supply chain sheltering around 7,413 factories. Interstate migrants move either individually or with the family through a skill training centre, relatives and friends. Wage is the biggest issue in this lockdown period next to social distancing in the residence (hostel) provided."

Karupasamy,
Director, READ

"We have had no salary since March. We dont have access to PDS and an NGO has given us some rice, pulses and oil. What will happen once this runs out? The company did not help in any way. Some people have taken loans, some people have pleaded for support from people they know. In some houses, the many are surviving on just one meal a day including for the children. We also have to buy water at the rate of Rs 40 per day. We are in a lot of trouble".

- Rabin from West Bengal

"The textile industry has a very large women force and most women are given unskilled work so that their wages can be kept low. For those who work in the formal workforce as well, there are huge disparities in pay, facilities and provisions. Often, those working in mills receive an additional cash incentive if they work for 26 days and women often either lose out on this money or have to compromise on their health during painful menstrual cycles and other such urgencies for which they would have otherwise taken leave. Even during menstruation, women are given tablets for pain, without being told what the side effects of taking these tablets are. Sanitary napkins are often not available on site and carrying them is often awkward as the bags are checked by male security staff."

Rajeshwari, Welfare Officer and Nurse, Tiruppur Mill

"The lockdown situation has been particularly unfair to the huge women workforce that is employed to carry out unskilled jobs in the various stages of the supply chain. As a home-based worker we have *faced a lot of issues during the lockdown since there is no income and there has been no support from government has also not helped. The 10kg ration rice given for a month for a whole family isn't enough to serve our need and the political leaders provide only few with rations differentiating the community based on various factors like class and caste."*

- Tamil Selvi, Home-Based Worker, Tiruppur

Subir Sinha, Department of Development Studies at SOAS shared, The relationship between workers and employers has become more asymmetrical in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Suppression of labour rights and making labour available to capital at as low a cost as possible has become part of a global growth model. It is not unique to India today.

Domestic Workers

"There is no clear definition of domestic workers in India and they have been denied social protection, policies and occupational rights for years. There are no administrative bodies that regulate agencies that employ these domestic workers and it affects the migrant labourers and their safety. Domestic work is seen as an unskilled job as it is considered that women who are not capable of doing any other work. Because of this, the minimum wage has also not been settled in this sector. Inter-state labourers are mostly troubled by the issue of forced as their voices are highly ignored. "

- Bharti Birla, ILO

Fatima, a resident of New Delhi and also a member of "Gharelu Madadgar Union" for a few years, "In the society where I work, a cook tested corona positive and the members in the society arranged for a scanning procedure after which the scanning was conducted only for the domestic workers. Why were

only we subjected to tests? None of the rich people had to get tested. Cant they get Covid-19? But we were threatened that we cannot enter the colony without a test. Why is it that such strict rules are only applied to those who are poor? If I go near the children of the house, the employers react in a different way, they react as if we are roaming around with Covid-19 in our pockets. They want us to be distant from their children but we also have our own at home. It's an equal risk for us too to be exposed to them. It is only because we are financially weak"

"Be it Covid-19 or any other thing, it is the poor who always bear the brunt. In spite of working like every other person, domestic workers do not get the due respect they deserve. While many employers paid their domestic workers wages during the lockdown, this happened for a very brief period. Some were asked to leave from work and some didn't receive their salary at all"

– *Poonam, Domestic worker in Delhi*

Visalatchi, a Domestic Worker from Chennai

"Those who registered as a member of the unorganised workers union received Rs.1000 from the government. Many are unaware of such registration and welfare boards. It is important to register to avail of benefits. We have to submit documents like Aadhar and Ration card in the Village Administrative Officer. Though the government has announced a transport facility pass for domestic workers however we have not benefited from this, we cannot afford the transportation costs."

Other Workers

"Migrant workers who came back to their native places are still facing challenges. Those who returned by trains and buses some of them were registered, but those who returned by foot were completely missed out in the registration process. They did not get any jobs under MGNREGA as they had hoped and were supposed to. Around 52 per cent workers got registered in Jharkhand. Due to the lack of employment opportunities they are forced to return to their destination states".

- Ramu Anand, Jharkhand, Dalit Vikas Samiti

Petty Contractors are at the fulcrums of activity at the last mile. It is important to see them as a separate category from big contractors - they are at the lowest rung in the supply chain. They mobilise labour and get the work done. At some level they also work there and most of them are unregistered.

"Most of the suppliers have been using sub-contractors to get labour for their work as the paperwork and government formalities are less when contracted by the sub-contractors. Due to this, most of the suppliers would be able to see higher profits and the sub-contractors in-between face the brunt of using their personal savings or money to their labourers due to delay in payments. If the payments are even delayed for 15 days, we have to borrow speed loans at an interest of 15-20 per cent to for the 15 days period."

- Senthil (name changed) a sub-contractor in Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

"The contractor often gets stuck between the worker and the company - if the worker does not get pay, it is the contractor who has to face the brunt. The lockdown did not give any time to the workers to return home. They were stranded with no income and were unable to return home. The government should have provided better care for the informal labour class and should have supported them with time to reach their town."

- Jagdish Prasad Saini, petty contractor, Jaipur

"Rationally thinking if the economy is run by three forces of labour, capital and technology why is an undue call being made on labour to substitute a cost that has occurred due to the pandemic? Why are we not looking at bettering technology? Why are we not taking a look at the capital? Always when it comes to bearing the brunt of it always falls on the people with the lowest bargaining power. Unfortunately, today it has become the workers with the lowest bargaining power and this can only be remedied by finding newer ways to solidarity.

- Tom Thomas, CEO, Praxis

Partner Organisations

Bheema Foundation

Centre for Action and Rural Education

Child Labour Free Jaipur

Corporate Responsibility Watch

Dalit Chetna Trust

Dialectics India

Development Solutions

Evidence

Federation of SC/ST Entrepreneurs

The Freedom Fund

Gethu Group

Gauvrav Gramin Mahila Vikas Manch

IConcern

Indian Federation of App-Based Workers

Indo Global Social Service Society

Partner Organisations

Indian Institute for Human Settlements

Jawahar Jyoti Bal Vikas Kendra

Joint Movement Against High-Tension Towers

Jan Swasthya Abhiyan

Krishnagiri Development Programme

Labour Education and Development Society

Leher

Madad

National Alliance Group for De-notified and Nomadic Tribes

Nav Bhartiya Nari Vikas Samiti

New Hope India

Promotion and Advancement of Justice, Harmony and Rights of Adivasis

Partners in Change

Pardada Pardadi

Pragati Madhyam Samiti

Partner Organisations

Railway Children

Rights Education and Development Centre

Rupantaran

Sahayog

Samarth Foundation

Solidarity Foundation

Save the Children

Save the Children India

Tarun Chetna Sansthan

Tamilnadu Alliance Group

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