



Voices from the Field

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Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has exemplified perfectly how women can rise and respond to public health challenges. Accounts from the field during India's lockdown period suggest that Self Help Groups (SHGs) of women were being involved by State Governments in the fight against COVID-19. Across the country, SHGs have been key in providing access to resources to most vulnerable populations to the last mile. They have manufactured masks, run community kitchens, assisted in health checks, as well as ensured that relief rations reach the beneficiaries. They have also helped develop awareness about the virus in their local languages and in a culturally-sensitive manner within their communities. Yet, SHGs and their members have been deeply impacted both socially and economically, with many citing intensive losses to work and livelihood, increased drudgery and burden of unpaid care work and rising incidences of domestic violence as a source of additional duress. In this report, Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE) explores and summarises insights from various recent research and conversations around how women are dealing with the pandemic and the remedies that would help them.



Key Highlights

1. Opportunities for women's employment in **rural areas may further decline with return of (male) migrants to their villages** and their reluctance to go back to cities for work - with potential implications for 'crowding out' women from paid work opportunities through new intra-household dynamics. IWWAGE recommends that to remedy this, job creation for women in public employment should be ensured - as workers in government schemes (e.g. anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, etc)
2. Women's workload of performing domestic chores has increased, exacerbated with school closure, lack of access to Mid-Day Meals and family members not being in employment through the day.
3. Especially for frontline workers such as Community Resource Persons (CRPs) making masks and running community kitchens, ASHAs, ANMs, AWWs, whose work outside the household has increased with COVID-19 crisis management, there has been an increased burden to balance work in public service provision roles and unpaid work in the household.
4. In PRADAN's forthcoming study too, **54 per cent of women respondents shared that their workload and drudgery has increased**, with tasks including cooking more food, washing more clothes, cleaning more utensils, going far to fetch more water, walking to banks or to the PDS centres for getting entitlements, selling vegetables door to door, picking cow-dung for fuelwood, and boiling water regularly.
5. Education is getting affected due to school closures with workers expressing concern that children would not be able to return to school after such a long absence. Drop-out incidences may also increase.
6. Both SEWA's study and PRADAN's forthcoming study also indicated that **women struggled with helping children in completing home-schooling/ homework**.
7. Special focus would now be needed to provide skill trainings for adolescent girls, including through setting up necessary infrastructure such as working girls' hostels, besides converging with MoRD initiatives such as DDU-GKY and RSETIs.
8. Sectors which employ large numbers of women, and **which could harbour potential in the future for expanded employment opportunities for women would need more policy attention** – health, education, manufacturing (garment, handloom, handicraft) and community-based care.

Read more: <https://iwwage.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Voices-from-the-Field-com.pdf>

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