

## For Favour of Publication

**Patna, May 7.** The International Growth Centre (IGC) and Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI), in collaboration with CORENET, organised a three day conference titled “The impact of COVID-19 in India and pathways to recovery”. The ongoing COVID-19 health crisis has affected lives across the world and caused a massive economic shock. The situation in India is particularly dire, with a deadly second wave of infections sweeping across the country. To help policy makers understand the severity of the crisis, IGC India is gathering new evidence around the socio-economic impact of COVID-19. These studies focus primarily on three themes: labour markets, households, and health and wellbeing.

The 1st day began with introductory remarks by **Robin Burgess**, Director, IGC and Professor of Economics London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He **stated that** the pandemic’s shock and severity of what is happening now is unparalleled. He stressed on the fact that 1/3rd of people who came out of poverty will be thrown back again into poverty. **Ashmita Gupta** (ADRI) setting the context of the labour panel **stated that** as much as 18 million Indian workers will be forced to switch to new occupations by 2030 because of the pandemic. **Swati Dhingra** (LSE) presented her research on ‘Informal workers and labour market risk during COVID-19 in India’ where **shared that** there is a demand for active labour market policies such as job guarantees, cash transfers, minimum wages and unionisation. The Government should address the issue urgently. **Clément Imbert** (University of Warwick) shared that even in the normal situation access to good urban jobs is difficult for rural migrants especially female and SC/ST population. Some of the results pointed out that females who were part of the DDU-GKY actually retained the job even after the lockdown, however for male it is more casual/informal work where men transitioned from salaried jobs to casual jobs more compared to women. With the second wave it will become much more difficult to integrate them back into the labour market. **Farzana Afridi** (ISI, Delhi) **shared that** in Delhi, mental distress is relatively higher for women and men’s earnings were lower by 27.8% relative to pre-crisis, while women’s fell by 47%. **Dipak Kumar Singh** (Government of Bihar) **stated that** job guarantee programmes cannot be a substitute for social security and highlighted some of the key challenges i.e. MNREGA wage level is very low, registration of informal workers is still a challenge, and many of the skilling jobs and programmes are not aligned with the industry requirements. It is important to think on how social protection measures can be planned such as fixing the minimum wage of the labour and to ensure the registration of informal workers and at the same time how to counterbalance the informalization of the job market.

For setting the tone of the next panel on ‘The economic impact of COVID-19 on households’ Dr **Pronab Sen** (IGC) **stated that** nearly 84% of Indian households experienced losses in income since the first lockdown last year. **Ashwini Deshpande** (Ashoka University) presented her research on the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on rural communities and self-help group members. She **shared that** labour income was volatile and households ate cheaper food 35% of the time during lockdown. She emphasised that PDS should be made universal along with cash transfer programs. **Gaurav Datt** (Monash University) discussed his research on livelihoods and COVID-19 in rural Bihar. He **stated that** nearly every rural household participating in the research was affected by COVID19 and government assistance was disproportionately low relative to the economic impact and many households being excluded due to not meeting the eligibility criteria. **Harjot Kaur Bamrah** (Government of Bihar) **shared** her thoughts on the pandemic’s impact on women highlighting the increasing disparity of the digital divide which prevents women from accessing assistance provided by the government and pursuing higher education. She **mentioned that** this second wave was different for rural Bihar which seems to have had more impact as compared to last year. The panel shared their concluding thoughts by emphasizing that this second wave is a time of national

emergency and it needs to be a first order priority where the central government takes more responsibility and accountability towards dealing with the pandemic.

The next panel was on 'The economic impact of COVID-19 on health and wellbeing' which was moderated by **Shahid Vaziralli** (IGC). For setting the stage, he **acknowledged** the growing uncertainty around pandemic in India and its disastrous impact on food-security. Harlan Downs-Tepper (Duke University) shared his study results on the effects of covid-19 in Patna slums. He **stated that** half of households in Bangalore slums, and 80% households in Patna Slums lost primary source of income during the lockdown. **Mousumi Dutta** (Presidency University) discussed her research on the effect of COVID19 on women and children in rural Bihar. She **stated that** dietary intake of mothers had worsened. Though children seem to be better off but if by focusing on the 18-36 months group, dietary intake has worsened. No significant difference between JEEVIKA members and non-members. It also highlighted that political contacts have played a role in accessing Government schemes and buffering dietary intake. The Bihar government has used the PDS successfully to provide a buffer against falling consumption levels. While sharing the research results from Bihar, **Sunil Kumar Mishra** (IHD) stated that migrant's households are affected more and have a low dietary diversity. He emphasized that there should be provision of cash transfer to beneficiaries. **N Vijaya Lakshmi** (Government of Bihar) **stated that** the Government of Bihar has taken many initiatives with additional cash transfers to households and migrant population. Labour budget was increased under MNREGA for improving rural livelihood. Closing remark was delivered by **Dr. Pronab Sen** who highlighted that IGC research studies have emphasized on the social and economic impact, on how people and society interact. Many of these studies are micro studies and community level studies which take into account the social structures and behavioural aspects to understand the key determinants to inform government and policy makers to minimise the damage caused by COVID19. It is important to draw lessons from last year and work towards finding a way forward during this pandemic.

(Anjani Kumar Verma)