



Women prepares tortillas in a market after El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele ordered home quarantine for 30 days as a preventive measure due the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Santa Tecla, El Salvador - Photo: Jose Cabezas/REUTERS

Is COVID-19 biased against women?

26/03/2020 | 13:29 | [Mexico City] Amrita Bahri

Even though this virus is attacking the women and men alike, women in the long run will be the biggest victims of this pandemic

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The world is facing the pandemic of **COVID-19**. As of today, there are more than 400,000 cases of **COVID-19** confirmed in the world. More than 20,000 people have lost their lives due to this **pandemic**. Lives are being lost, **the economy is failing, jobs are insecure**, and there is a lot of fear in people's mind for their life, career, family, and loved ones. Amidst all this, something else is happening that we need to take an account of. Even though this virus is attacking the women and men alike, women in the long run will be the biggest victims of this pandemic. Coronavirus has put women at the frontline of this struggle. How is that? Well, there is not one reason, but five.



Almost 30% of **women workforce** is employed in **services industry**. Women are at the forefront of many roles in services industry; they serve as flight attendants, tourism guides, educators, and cleaners. 36% **female workforce** is employed in financial services industry. The fast-approaching **global economic crisis** will significantly affect the financial industry, which could result in massive firing of employees. Loss for tourism industry including aviation, cruise-liners, and hotels will also cost massive job loss in this industry. The lock down of educational institutions will also result in some job loss in education sector. **Women workers** employed in these sectors stand at an economically vulnerable position today.

Reason 2: Women will incur more economic losses than men as a large number of women work in informal sectors

Women, mostly in developing countries, are employed in informal and intermittent part-time works such as cleaning, cooking, care-taking, hairdressing, and street-vending jobs. These jobs will have a direct hit from this **health crisis**. With the current **Stay at Home mode** and **social distancing**, people are avoiding the entry of a third person into their homes. The offices are closing down. More and more countries are announcing a compulsory lockdown, leaving practically no one at roads. This leaves, massively so, cleaners, cooks, care-takers, hairdressers, and street-vendors out of their already poorly-paid employments. And they mostly have no job protection, no social security, no insurance, and very less or no savings at all.

Reason 3: Unpaid work at homes and domestic demands will increase

Men and **women** are now confined to working at homes. **Working women**, who could previously travel to their offices and focus on their professional lives away from the demands of their homes, are now managing to work from home. Whilst working at home, women usually tend to take a bigger chunk of **domestic responsibilities** even during the working hours. So, they have to cook more, clean more, and care more for the family members at home. This will make women more time-poor. Time-poverty is one of the barriers that impede women's access to trade and commerce.

Reason 4: Women owners of Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises will struggle to survive

More than thirty percent of **Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs)** in the world are owned by women entrepreneurs. Also, women-owned MSMEs tend to employ more women than men-owned MSMEs do. In the state of lockdown, it is a hard reality that many



they have to carry on bearing, could cause many of them to file for insolvency if this crisis extends for a few more months. These closures will therefore have a direct impact on women as employers as well as employees.

Reason 5: Women entrepreneurs will require longer times to reactivate their businesses

Approximately 50 percent of **women in the world do not have bank accounts or access to other financial services**. In the rural areas of low income countries, only about 20 percent of bank account holders are women. Women without bank accounts have no credit history. Also, women generally have less access to assets such as land or other property due to multiple reasons including men-favoring inheritance laws in many countries. Lack of credit history and assets would mean that women entrepreneurs will have greater difficulties than men in securing credit for reviving their businesses post crisis.

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Due to these reasons, this pandemic might throw women back a decade or so in terms of their economic empowerment. It could undo a lot of progress **women** have made in different sectors and industries. Once this crisis is over, we need to come together and employ different ways to repair the harms. Governments, international organizations and policymakers need to be aware of this loss, and they need to speed-up their efforts to reduce the existing **gender gap**. The **world economy** will suffer when **women**—who account for one half of the world's working-age population—will be further excluded from the economy and hence impeded from contributing to economic growth and development. International trade can serve as a tool to ensure that this does not happen, as it can be used to create more economic opportunities for **women** and to deconstruct the barriers women face to access economies. For this, countries need to conduct cross-border trade in an inclusive manner. International organizations, such as **World Trade Organization**, can play an instrumental role in guiding countries on conducting trade in such a manner that it leads to equal benefits and opportunities for women and men.

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