



# Global Report (Summary)



## Leave No Woman Behind

### Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Girls

### Facing Multiple Discrimination



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# Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic startled the world with its rapid spread and impact. As an X-ray displays illness, COVID-19 has exposed the ugly consequences of existing socio-economic, civil and environmental inequalities affecting women, already subject to various forms of discrimination. While women in general are facing massive job losses in the informal sector, increased domestic violence, rising poverty, and hunger and inequalities, women with double and multiple discrimination now are confronted with more extreme difficulties – in addition to the deaths and illness which have been caused by the virus. Women from indigenous communities, women from communities that suffer discrimination based on work and descent (DWD), women with disabilities, and older women are all experiencing the ordeals of multiple discrimination, an issue that today requires urgent attention of policy makers.

This global report on Leave No Women Behind (LNWB) has been prepared as part of GCAP's Faces of Inequality Campaign. It highlights the intersectionality of gender with other characteristics – being a member of an indigenous DWD community, being old, being a widow and/or living with disability. The study consists of four papers. The first is the global overview describing the multiple discrimination and exclusion women from different marginalised groups faced during the pandemic. The second paper describes in detail the inequalities, indignity and violence faced by women from DWD communities across the world. The third paper sets out the problems of women with disabilities in Africa. And the fourth paper looks at the conditions of women from indigenous communities in Asia who already were not only among the poorest of the poor but were also subject to human rights abuses including violations perpetrated by the state.

The study focuses on the need and the fight for social protection floors, adequately financed and fairly delivered, and the parallel fight against violence against women by both state and non-state actors during the pandemic. The study sets out recommendations for “building forward better”. We have sought to highlight and give attention to the voices and recommendations of the women, too often marginalised and invisible, to whom this report is dedicated.

## Overview

The World Bank has described COVID-19 as “a heat-seeking missile speeding toward the most vulnerable in society.” What does the World Bank mean by vulnerability? The World Bank paper equates vulnerability with poverty but, while poverty is indeed a vulnerability, certain groups carry

additional vulnerabilities. Women are the first and the largest group. Their vulnerability, differing across different societies, stems not from physical frailty, but entrenched attitudes of patriarchy and misogyny in the societies around them that permit and enable discrimination and unequal treatment. Likewise, the limitations experienced by people living with disabilities, especially women and girls, should not in themselves make them vulnerable – again the cause of their vulnerability is the discrimination that flows from entrenched attitudes and beliefs and denies them the rights and resources they need to thrive.

In all countries and regions poverty and discrimination interact with each other in a vicious circle, with discrimination intensifying poverty which in turn intensifies exclusion and further discrimination. Disabilities, old age, widowhood, an ethnic identity, location, a particular occupation or status, such as Dalits in south Asia or similar communities discriminated based on work and descent (DWD), can all combine and intersect to intensify discrimination.

Gender and disability multiply negative impacts – women and girls with disabilities are among those most left behind in terms of health and social care, social protection and services. The poor have much greater exposure to disease due to inadequate housing and overcrowding, vulnerable working conditions, high levels of air pollution, poor sanitation and water availability and lack of access to education of any kind, let alone quality education. Migrant workers as well as all those in informal work situations are particularly affected. In many places, minorities or migrant workers have also been made scapegoats and have been the object of hate speech and threats.



Meeting during the International Women's Day in Ghana in 2018

## Discrimination based on Work and Descent

Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD) is the UN terminology for structural and hierarchical systemic discrimination. (DWD) derives from beliefs about purity and pollution, and is a lifelong identity applied to individuals and families by virtue of birth in certain communities. Discrimination based on work relates to particularly stigmatised forms of labour, which certain groups are coerced into performing, for example, sanitation, dealing with dead bodies, leatherwork, devalued musical and performance traditions, and 'slave occupations.' The 'descent' (in Discrimination based on Work and Descent) refers to the inescapable, birth-based criteria of social structure enforced and sustained through endogamy – the custom or obligation of marrying only within the limits of a local community, clan, or tribe. In Africa, they are called Shambara in Somalia, Osu Oru in Nigeria, Haratine in Mauritania; in South Asia they are known as Scheduled Caste (Dalit); across Europe, Roma, Gypsy and Sinti; and in Brazil, they are the Quilombolas. Diaspora communities in different parts of the world also experience discrimination based on work and descent.

Gender discrimination can intersect with occupation and descent, intensifying disadvantage and increasing the vulnerability of women from stigmatised and excluded communities. In many cases, DWD communities are not recognised as such by their governments, with the consequence that there are no targeted policies and programmes for their welfare and development.

Like any disaster, COVID-19 exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities and further marginalised already oppressed and disadvantaged communities. Governments across the world provided immediate relief in cash and in kind, mitigating the impact of lockdown measures introduced to control the spread of the virus. Nevertheless, according to reports, for DWD communities relief assistance has been grossly inadequate; their access to entitlements has been restricted, and DWD women have been victims of violent assaults. Members of DWD communities tend to work in the informal sector and often lack the identity documents that are required for access to social assistance and welfare schemes.

In Sri Lanka, tea workers are considered as a DWD community and many work under exploitative conditions. According to news reports the sanitation facilities for women in the tea plantations are very poor, water provision is inadequate and measures taken to protect them from the virus are insufficient or altogether lacking. Families are often crammed into tiny, one room dwellings. In India, many thousands of internal migrants walked hundreds of kilometres from their workplaces during the shutdown in 2020 in order to shelter at home. Most belonged to Dalit or indigenous communities. In Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia, Roma women in particular were affected by disruption and restrictions to reproductive health services. Globally, DWD women whose livelihoods depend on casual labour or who work in unpaid care jobs have been most severely impacted during the pandemic.

## Women and girls with disabilities

Across Africa, COVID-19 has imposed heavy burdens on women already struggling to combine paid work, domestic chores and child care – burdens made more difficult to bear by poverty and entrenched patriarchal attitudes. For women and girls with disabilities, invisibility, stigma and marginalisation lead to multiple discrimination and violence, often perpetrated by those closest to them. Since the onset of the pandemic enforced lockdowns, curfews and increased dependence on others have increased their risks of violence, poverty and abuse. In Ghana, Kenya and Mali approximately one in five of the poorest people have a disability. Evidence gathered by GCAP

partners in these three countries demonstrates that women and girls with disabilities of all ages who survive by begging on the streets can be victims of human trafficking and exploitation, lured from the places where they beg by promises of employment, accommodation and a meal per day.

Governments across Africa are failing to adhere to their commitments framed by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD) and national and regional legislation derived from the CRPD, and to implement policies according to its provisions. The pathway to change is to listen to the voices of women and girls with disabilities, ensure their rights are implemented and include them in all policy arenas.

### Indigenous communities

It is estimated that there are around 410 million indigenous people in the world, constituting 5% of global population. There are 260 million Indigenous people in Asia with 2,000 distinct civilizations and languages. The majority of Indigenous Peoples in Asia have faced historical suppression, marginalization and socio-economic and political discrimination with no legal or constitutional recognition. Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately represented in the poorest segments of the population; constitute a large proportion of workers in the informal economy; and have limited access to social protection because eligibility requirements exclude them from full and effective participation. Their rights are repeatedly violated and there is no legal recognition that they have or should have collective rights as peoples, nor is there acknowledgement of their rights to self-governance, identity and culture.

Development aggression – a term used to describe the extraction of natural resources in indigenous territories as ‘national development’ – in most of the Asian nations has destroyed the resources of Indigenous Peoples and expelled them from their ancestral lands and territories. Despite the spread of the virus, development projects opposed by indigenous communities and military operations continue in the Philippines, Myanmar, India and Bangladesh. Appropriation (land-grabbing) of indigenous territories by development projects increased during lockdowns together with increased attacks on indigenous human rights defenders, many of whom are women, through red-tagging, vilification, illegal arrest, detention, killings and sexual assaults.

**3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

**FIGHT INEQUALITY TO ENSURE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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COVID-19 has reinforced existing inequalities and the marginalisation of indigenous communities. Within these communities it is women and girls, persons with disabilities and older persons who have been most affected. They are most exposed to disadvantage in the labour market, high rates of poverty, limited access of infrastructure and public services, including water and sanitation, and the impacts of climate change.

Indigenous communities are more at risk from Covid-19 owing to their limited access to health services, the failure to provide information in native languages on the virus and relief packages, inadequate testing services, restrictions on travel and lack of transportation. Indigenous women and children in some Asian countries were excluded from of social protection measures and relief packages because they did not have the required legal documentation and ID papers. Indigenous women migrant workers have been hit particularly hard by the loss of employment, and there have been reports of hunger, torture and violence.

## Recommendations

- ❖ Social protection schemes should be put in place with adequate finance in the wake of the pandemic to help all communities survive with dignity. This requires a long-term financial commitment to Covid-19 recovery plans with social protection at their centre, based on social justice, equity and rights based-approaches for community resilience.
- ❖ Governments should guarantee equal access to vaccines, basic health services and participation in recovery programmes without discrimination, and should ensure that data disaggregated by age, disability, ethnicity, location and poverty status are made available to monitor these commitments.
- ❖ The Covid-19 pandemic must not be allowed to excuse lack of action on the SDGs. Rather it should be seen as a wake-up call for greater action. The SDGs link economic and social priorities with the call for urgent environmental measures to tackle our climate, biodiversity and pollution crises. They provide the framework for policies to ensure the well-being of all people, across

**4 QUALITY  
EDUCATION**



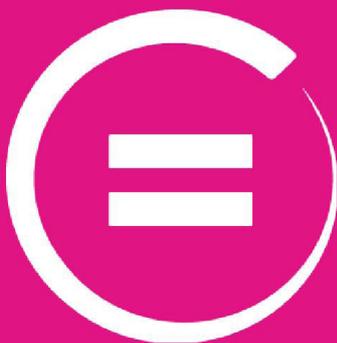
**FIGHT INEQUALITY  
TO ENSURE  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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the life course and in all their diversity, and are a guide to the creation of genuine and accountable global partnerships, founded on human rights principles, for sustainable development, redistribution and decisive measures to reduce inequality between and within nations.

- ❖ All states must adhere to human rights commitments, and adopt and adapt policies, laws, programmes and budgets accordingly. These include the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); the Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and the duly ratified ILO Conventions, Protocols and social security guarantees relating to migrant workers, indigenous people, wage protection, domestic workers, health provisions for workers and the social protection floor.
- ❖ Fully disaggregated data are urgently needed on the impacts of Covid-19, especially on women experiencing discrimination. Poor data are a consequence of and a cause of invisibility, lack of voice and human rights abuses. For example there are no comprehensive statistics on the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls living with disabilities in Africa. Despite this, there is mounting evidence that violence and prejudice against women and girls with disabilities, of all ages and ethnicities, has increased during the pandemic.
- ❖ Priority must be given to tackling inadequate housing, overcrowding and ensuring access of all without restrictions to essential services. People living in poverty are more exposed to disease by inadequate housing and overcrowding, vulnerable working conditions, high levels of air pollution, poor sanitation and inadequate water availability and lack of access to education of any kind, let alone quality education. Migrant workers and women, men and children working in the informal economy and in precarious employment are particularly affected.
- ❖ Ensure meaningful representation of older women, widows, women with disabilities, indigenous and DWD women in national, regional and international political and financial processes.

**10 REDUCE  
INEQUALITIES**



**FIGHT INEQUALITY  
TO ENSURE  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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- ❖ Policy makers must focus on the on rising poverty, hunger, violence and inequality faced by women from indigenous communities, women from DWD communities, women with disabilities, and older women. Adding to the risk of death and illness during the pandemic, discrimination against women based on ethnicity, age and disability has increased, rooted in entrenched attitudes and beliefs that deny them the rights and resources they need to thrive.
- ❖ There must be a greater focus on DWD people and communities who are disproportionately impacted owing to their occupation and descent. Gender exacerbates discrimination based on occupation and descent, putting women from stigmatised and excluded communities in an especially disadvantageous and vulnerable position, as their work in casual labour and unpaid care jobs has been severely impacted by the pandemic.
- ❖ Special support should be given to older women and women with disabilities who are struggling to combine paid and casual work, domestic chores and childcare. Impacts of Covid-19 on older women and women with disabilities in Africa include reduced access to health services, including maternal health; increased exposure to domestic violence in lockdowns; unrelieved burdens of caring for the sick; and loss of income without compensation as opportunities for work in the informal sector dry up.
- ❖ Attention must be given to the inequality and marginalization experienced by Indigenous Communities, among whom women and girls, widows, persons with disabilities and older women are the most affected. Without legal documentation and recognition indigenous women migrant workers are exposed to hunger, torture and violence and are unable to access social protection measures and relief packages.
- ❖ Effective action to provide protection for all Indigenous women and girls, not excluding those with disabilities, widows and older women, requires first of all that their voices be heard and listened to and that government, civil society organisations, communities, and other partners work closely together. Particular attention should be given to women in conflict zones, and militarized regions.

5 GENDER  
EQUALITY

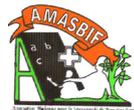




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