



Christian Conference of Asia – Webinar Series

The Impact of COVID-19 Crisis on Women in Asia: *Vital Needs and Post-Crisis Recovery*

Concept Note

The proliferation of the COVID-19 pandemic across the world has already gravely affected women, with its impacts and consequences likely to deepen as countries struggle to contain the crisis. Imminent effects and potential threats to the wellbeing of women have been reported in the form of preventable maternal deaths, unavailability or limited access to family planning means, and increases in the incidence of gender-based violence and domestic abuse, in addition to other harmful consequences.

While containment and lockdown measures are essential in mitigating the spread of the virus, they adversely affect the socio-economic wellbeing of people around the world. The ongoing crisis has crippled the informal and organised sectors, of which women make up a disproportionate percentage of workers (almost 90 percent in Asia). Textile and service industries with predominantly female workers have been the worst-hit by the crisis. Bangladesh's garment industry has laid off more than a million workers in recent weeks, of which eighty percent are women. Given the already-persistent lack of protection under labour laws and negligible access to paid sick leave or health insurance, women are now even more vulnerable and are at greater risk of falling into unrelenting poverty. Trends in Asia reveal that even in formal employment, women are often the most dispensable and are the first to lose their jobs.

The plight of women healthcare workers in South and Southeast Asian countries, who have been at the frontlines in combatting the disease, has worsened in light of longstanding gender inequalities. Globally, 67 percent of workers in healthcare are women. Physically and mentally exhausted, nurses are working round-the-clock to provide care, putting themselves and their families at risk of infection, even as the demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) far outstrips its supply.

Simultaneously, women typically shoulder greater domestic responsibilities in terms of caring for the children and the elderly in their families. The crisis has added to the domestic workload of women with severe impacts on their health and safety. While households are said to be typically "safe spaces" under lockdown in terms of physical distancing, they can become sites of increased domestic violence and abuse as women are now "locked up" with the perpetrators. As COVID-19 has placed economic stress on thousands of families, children, and in particular girls, are at greater risk of exploitation.

Long-term closures of schools and critical education providers has resulted in increasing drop-out rates, which disproportionately affects adolescent girls. Although education service providers are shifting to online modes of delivery, a large number of young girls are least likely to have access to the necessary technology. This will have compounded effects and will exacerbate gender gaps in education and increase the risk of sexual exploitation, child marriage and forced marriage, and early and unwanted pregnancies in several Asian countries. Girls, especially those from marginalised communities and those with disabilities, will be particularly affected by the secondary impacts of the outbreak.

Although several women's groups and organisations across Asia are directly engaged in responding to the crisis, what must be realised is that the impact of COVID-19 is experienced by women not only during the pandemic but will also persist in the long-run in various forms. It is, therefore, critical to initiate adequate measures with concrete action plans in the post-crisis recovery phase in order to ensure improved response capabilities while addressing the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on Asian women.

Efforts in the short-term must include coordinated health responses to suppress transmission and end the pandemic while scaling up capacities for testing and treatment. Governments must prioritise the provision of assistance to women who are less privileged or are marginalised in the social structures of Asian societies. Additionally, it also crucial to address the devastating social and economic dimensions of the crisis, and the design of post-crisis relief and stimulus packages must be cognisant of the unique needs of women. Given that the economic challenges and shocks suffered by women are more likely to expose them to increased exploitation, abuse, and high-risk work, post-crisis care cannot afford to invisibilise the needs of Asian women.

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) has been closely monitoring the situation through its member constituencies and networks in different Asian countries. The CCA has initiated and organised a series of webinars to engage its member churches and councils as well as other partner organisations to develop effective responses to the COVID-19 crisis. The fourth in this series of webinars is 'The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on Women in Asia: Vital Needs and Post-Crisis Recovery', and is scheduled for 21 May 2020 from 12:00–14:00 Bangkok (Thailand) time.

Objectives

This virtual session aims to facilitate discussions and reflections among women and men in Asia:

- to understand the magnitude of the issues and challenges faced uniquely by women in the context of COVID-19 crisis;

- to be informed of how churches and women’s organisations in different countries and regions in Asia are serving their women to deal with and respond to the pandemic; and,
 - to initiate deliberations on the redressal of the vital needs of women in Asia and the design of post-crisis recovery.
-

Panellists

The following panellists will share different perspectives:

1. **Melissa Alvarado**
UN Women – Asia Pacific
2. **Rev. Diana Tana**
Vice Moderator, CCA
3. **Deekshya Illangasinghe**
Executive Director, South Asians for Human Rights, Sri Lanka
4. **Maya Dania**
Mae Fah Luang University, Thailand/Indonesia
5. **Basil Fernando**
Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), Hong Kong
6. **Nirmala Gurung**
YWCA Asia, Nepal
7. **Rev. Kyrie Kim**
Chairperson, CCA Programme Committee, South Korea
8. **Srey Sotheavy**
Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT), Cambodia

The session will be moderated by Dr Mathews George Chunakara, the CCA General Secretary.