Addressing Gender-based Violence (GBV) in South Asia during Pandemic: Evidence to advise Policy, Prevention & Response

In most parts of South Asia, gender inequalities flourish and are kept alive due to the prevalence of conservative and patriarchal values along with discriminatory social norms and practices. Multifaceted inequalities in South Asia are further exacerbated by gender discrimination which ultimately negatively affects progress and development for both boys and girls.

The meagre progress made in closing the gender gap in South Asia over the years is at risk of being reversed due to the social, economic, and health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has exposed structural gaps and weaknesses in the region’s social, economic, and political systems which need to be addressed lest the little progress made thus far is also lost. Additionally, it has overburdened healthcare and social protection systems and left the vulnerable segments of society isolated from support and protection vis-à-vis the restriction of movement and accessibility to and for essential and frontline workers. Economic impacts from lockdowns have also led to increased incidences of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women.

It is always challenging to respond to Gender-based Violence (GBV), particularly in a time of crisis when governments and practitioners are working to simultaneously address a range of issues, from public health concerns to economic repercussions. Research has shown that violence against women has been on the rise due COVID-19 lockdowns and households faced with unemployment and low income were the most affected. Subsequently, there is a need for policies to support low-income households to provide stability as well as creating and restoring stable jobs. Women can avoid coercion and violence if integrated in the social and economic fabric of society and if there are broad strategies during the response and recovery phase that cater to their needs in South Asia. It is under this context that the panel seeks to address the following key questions:

- What are some of the key challenges in South Asia with regards to addressing GBV that donors and policymakers faced during the ongoing pandemic?
- What are some best practices and key initiatives that can be taken to address Violence Against Women (VAW), while acknowledging the significant impact of COVID-19 on incidence, response, and data?
- How can regional research inform policymakers in taking actionable measures to address increased incidences of GBV during the pandemic?

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