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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted women more than the men and further increased the gender gap. Discuss the statement. (250 words)

20 Jul, 2021 GS Paper 2 Social Justice

Approach

- Give a brief about the Covid-19 pandemic and associated challenges.
- Discuss how the pandemic impacted women more than the men.
- Give a way forward to better the women's situation in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- Conclude suitably

Introduction

Covid-19 pandemic is a far greater social, economic, and political phenomenon than merely a biomedical one. Due to its ill-effects on lives and livelihood, the pandemic is turning into one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent human history.

As the pandemic continues to affect lives and livelihoods around the world, its economic fallout is having a regressive effect on gender equality.

Body

Impact on Women

- **More Women Unemployed:** Women were more affected than men by employment issues. Women made up just 24% of those working before the pandemic, yet accounted for 28% of all those who lost their jobs.
Women's jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable to this crisis than men's jobs.
- **Issues of Food Insecurity:** Loss in incomes for women as well as their households led to reduction in food supply and women were affected more than other members of the family.
- **Issues of Reproductive Health:** Women's health indicators also deteriorated because they could no longer afford contraception and menstrual products.
About 16% of women (an estimated 17 million if extrapolated) had to stop using menstrual pads, and more than one in three married women were unable to access contraceptives.
- **Unpaid Labour:** Indian women already do almost three times more unpaid work than Indian men, and the survey showed a 47% increase in unpaid labour for women, and a 41% increase in unpaid care work for women.

- **Marginalised Groups:** Women from historically marginalised groups (Muslims, migrants, single/separated/divorced), were more affected than the average woman.
 - The variance is across the board, with more single, separated/divorced women having limited food or running out of food and many more Muslim women losing their income and livelihood.
 - Conditions on the ground are likely to worsen for those women (such as dalit women and transgender individuals) who bear the brunt of social discrimination.

Way Forward

- **Expanding public distribution system (PDS):** Expanding **PDS** beyond food as it's a far-reaching delivery channel. For instance, women's access to menstrual pads could be revolutionised in this fashion for the short term, improving reach considerably.
- **Benefits of Schemes Must Be Universalised:** Strengthen the resilience of **SHGs** by focusing on their economic recovery and market linkages via the existing **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission**.
- **Inclusive Approach:** Focus on the inclusion of single, divorced/separated women in the **One Nation One Ration Card** rollout, and build social assistance programmes for informal workers, specifically domestic workers and casual labourers.
- **Interventions to address digital and financial inclusion.** Closing the gender gap in digital inclusion is an urgent priority in the pandemic.

Conclusion

There is a need for **universalising, deepening, and extending the government schemes** in order to help every woman come out of the ill impact from the pandemic as soon as possible.

Making the right investments in women's issues now could prove transformational in the long-term recovery and health of our economy and society.