



GLOBAL UPLIFTMENT OF HUMAN ADVOCACY AND RIGHT

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Date: 16th May, 2020

Webinar Report

GUHAR, an NGO that works in the field of education and livelihood, organised the second national webinar on the theme “**Current Socio-Economic Challenges and Opportunities**” (COVID 19) on 16th May 2020. It saw participation by young researchers, scholars, professors and students from across the country. There were more than one hundred and seventy participants along with six Resource persons. The topic was well received by the attendees. The webinar proceedings are as mentioned below.

The webinar began with introductory remarks by convener Mr. Deepak Kumar. He was elated by the tremendous participation of the attendees and expressed his gratitude towards them. He then, emphasized upon various concerns related to the current pandemic and insisted on the need for a global effort to tackle this issue. He said that, this webinar series will make a sincere attempt to consider and evaluate the social and economic impacts caused by this global epidemic with the help of six esteemed academicians and experts.

The welcome address was delivered by Dr. Rahul Chimurkar, Asst. Professor at Lakshmibai College, University of Delhi. With great enthusiasm, he addressed the curious audience and instilled in them, more vigor and vitality. He outlined the fact that it is certainly troubling that so many people and countries have been affected, in such less time. But it could very well be the first pandemic in history, whose affects can be controlled. The great advantage we have is that the decisions we all make – as governments, businesses, communities, families and individuals – can influence the trajectory of this epidemic to a very large extent.

The entire session was chaired by Dr. Uma Shankar Pandey, Principal, School of Open Learning & Officer on Special Duty (OSD), Campus of Open Learning, University of Delhi, Delhi. He spoke eloquently on the role of technology during COVID 19. He emphasised upon the fact that people from faraway places are able to connect easily through the use of technology. Today’s webinar was a testament to that. He also talked about the different experiments initiated by education and research institutions like IIT (Kanpur) and IIT (Delhi) who are playing an instrumental role in supplying the essential items like N-95 masks, cheap testing kits, ventilators etc. The tireless efforts put in by them has provided the much needed help in these crucial times.

The first speaker of the webinar, Miss. Dhvani Jain, President, SRPM (India) spoke on the role of Civil Society organisations during the current pandemic. She said that Civil society is acting as a bridge between the government and individuals. They are the torchbearers for every other sector. Civil society has been consistently providing support to the marginalised sections of our society on the ground level. It is in a way supplementing the efforts of the government in

tackling this pandemic. She also explained that how, in the post-Covid world, Civil Society would play a prominent role in helping people to adapt to the changing conditions worldwide. She ended her address by suggesting everyone to extend all assistance possible to the under privileged sections in our vicinity and adopt all precautionary measures to prevent the spread of this virus.

The next speaker Mr. Sudhanshu Singh, Principal Consultant, Feedback Infra, India dwelled upon the economic implications of COVID-19 and ways to revive the economic growth in the post-Covid era. He highlighted upon the subsequential lowering of demand and decrease in liquidity as major challenges. The substantial fall in demand during this pandemic has led to a major crisis and even the domestic markets have taken a hard hit because of that. He stated the fact that government needs to increase its spending on health infrastructure which is the need of the hour and could very well bring the much needed respite for the suffering masses. He then, focused on increasing the purchasing power of the people by giving some monetary reliefs with which the government has already started, alongwith strengthening MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) which can turn around the rising problem of unemployment. MSMEs can prove to be a boon for the economy and that is why he appreciated the financial stimulus provided by the government through “Atmannirbhar Bharat Abhiyan” package. The revival of the economy will be dependent on these prompt measures of the government and also the utilisation of these opportunities to the optimum level by the emerging class of entrepreneurs.

The next speaker Dr. Ravinder Kumar, Assistant Professor, Gurukul Kangri Vishwavidyalaya, Haridwar dwelled on the role of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) during the current pandemic. This pandemic has transformed the centuries-old, chalk-talk teaching model to one driven by technology. ICT standard models are the unsung heroes in the current times. He outlined the different platforms started by the government at various levels to make sure the learning process continues in this crisis. He said platforms like SWAYAM, epg Pathshaala, Shodhganga etc are helping both the students and teachers in fulfilling the vacuum created by offline teaching. For instance, DIKSHA, a platform by the Ministry of Human Resource development, provides free vernacular content, backed by low bandwidth capability and strong offline functionality. He also talked about the challenges like digital literacy, inadequate digital infrastructure in the rural areas, connectivity issues, teachers’ training etc. This pandemic has provided a great opportunity to boost our digital literacy by using all the recent techniques of technology including AI.

The next speaker Dr. Pradeep Kumar Panda, an Economist, Author, Columnist & Development Professional, said we are going through a depression-like situation in our economy. He substantiated his arguments with various indicators like low GDP (1.2% by IMF), low inflation, growing Fiscal deficit etc. He mentioned about the sectors which are badly hit by the macro economic crisis caused by COVID-19. Travel and tourism industry is the worst hit sector followed by FMCG i.e Fast Moving Consumer Goods, automobile industry and so on. He argued that MSMEs constitute the backbone of our economy as they contribute 30% to our GDP. There is an urgent need to inject funds into this particular sector. He also suggested strengthening schemes like MNREGA which employ informal workers, eventually increasing their purchasing power to boost demand in the country. He also suggested that government must release all the pending GST returns to the states, IT refunds should be released etc to enhance the expenditure capacity of middle class.

The last speaker, Dr. Paramananda Barman, Scientist, CSIR-NISCAIR, New Delhi spoke on the misinformation and fake news generated during this pandemic. He said, that like this epidemic, we are also facing something called “Infodemic”, where we become victims to fake news through whatsapp and other such mediums. He also cautioned about the confusing terminology of ‘social distancing’. Rather, he emphasized on using the word ‘Physical distancing’. He outlined a major challenge in acquiring correct and reliable information. He said that since most of the information is available in English everywhere, thus it becomes quite difficult for the common masses to receive the correct information. He suggested following updates on reliable websites like that of different Ministries, WHO, ICMR etc.

This webinar was then followed by a question and answer session, where many participants came up with their queries and the speakers promptly responded to each one of them.

Vote of thanks was given by Mr. Divyanshu Shangari, Secretary (GUHAR) who provided a fitting closure to the webinar, extending his gratitude to the esteemed speakers, who made the webinar a truly enriching experience for one and all present. He, then, concluded the seminar gratefully recognized the contributions made by each and every speaker on the issue of COVID-19 and its many tangents. Furthermore, acknowledging the many hours of tireless work and efforts put into making this webinar a success, he extended his heartfelt gratitude to the organizers Mr. Deepak Kumar, Dr. Rahul Chimurkar, Mr. Kaustubh Mani, Mr. Lovekesh, Mr. Vibhor and others, without whom the webinar could not be termed a success.



Deepak Kumar
Convener
President (GUHAR)