

The Inequality Virus Report

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In News: Recently, Oxfam has released a report titled 'The Inequality Virus'

Key Highlights

- The report has found that the Covid pandemic deeply exacerbated existing inequalities in India and around the world.
- The report highlighted that as the pandemic stalled the economy, forcing millions of poor Indians out of jobs, the richest billionaires in India increased their wealth by 35 per cent.
- The report stated that the wealth of Indian billionaires increased by 35 per cent during the lockdown and by 90 per cent since 2009 to \$422.9 billion ranking India sixth in the world after the US, China, Germany, Russia and France.
- India's top 100 billionaires saw their fortunes increase by Rs 12.97 trillion during lockdown which was enough to give every one of the 138 million poorest Indians a cheque for Rs 94,045 each.
- The report points out that 170,000 people lost their jobs every hour in the month of April 2020.
- The Oxfam calculations found that the increase in wealth of the top 11 billionaires of India during the pandemic could sustain the NREGS scheme for 10 years or the health ministry for 10 years.

Observations made

Sectoral Inequality

- India's large informal workforce was the worst hit as it made up 75 percent of the 122 million jobs lost.
- The informal workers had relatively fewer opportunities

to work from home and suffered more job loss compared to the formal sector.

- The report noted that the 40-50 million seasonal migrant workers, typically engaged working in construction sites, factories etc. were particularly distressed.

Health

- Beyond income and job losses, poorer women also suffered healthwise because of the disruption in regular health services and Anganwadi centres.
- Only 6% of the poorest 20% have access to non-shared sources of improved sanitation, compared to 93.4 % of the top 20 %.

Education

- Till October, 32 crores students were hit by the closure of schools, of whom 84 % resided in rural areas and 70 % attended government schools.
- Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims were likely to see a higher rate of dropout.
- Girls were also most vulnerable as they were at risk of early and forced marriage, violence and early pregnancies, it noted.

Gender

- Unemployment of women rose by 15% from a pre-lockdown level of 18 %, which could result in a loss of India's GDP of about 8 % or ₹15 trillion.
- Women who were employed before the lockdown were also 23.5 percentage points less likely to be re-employed compared to men in the post lockdown phase.

Sanitation Facility

- Only 6% of the poorest 20% households had access to non-shared sources of improved sanitation, compared to 93%

of the top 20% households in India.

- In terms of caste, just 37.2% of Scheduled Castes (SCs) households and 25.9% of Scheduled Tribes (STs) households had access to non-shared sanitation facilities, compared to 65.7% for the general population.

Oxfam International

- Oxfam International is a group of independent non-governmental organisations formed in 1995.
- The name "Oxfam" comes from the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, founded in Britain in 1942.
- The group campaigned for food supplies to starving women and children in enemy-occupied Greece during the Second World War.
- It aims to maximize efficiency and achieve greater impact to reduce global poverty and injustice.
- The Oxfam International Secretariat is based in Nairobi, Kenya