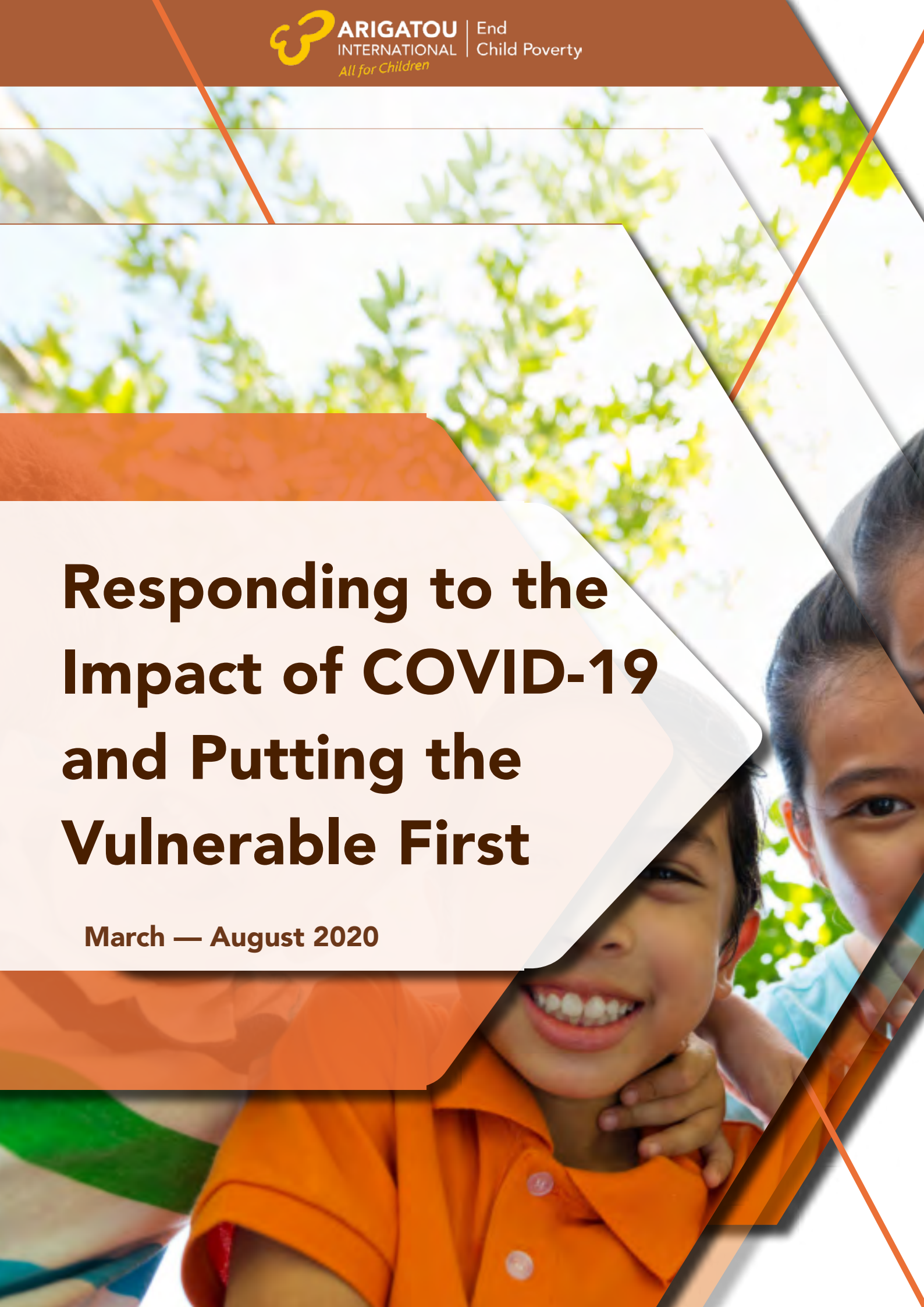


# **Responding to the Impact of COVID-19 and Putting the Vulnerable First**

**March — August 2020**





# Faith in Action for Children:

## Our Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

### EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON CHILDREN AND OUR RESPONSE: AN OVERVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic's economic fallout could push up to 86 million more children into household poverty by the end of 2020, according to UNICEF. The pandemic's massive socioeconomic effect has also exposed and widened the already existing and persistent inequalities among people and countries.

The International Labour Organization on the other hand estimates that half of working people could lose their jobs in 2020 and the pandemic could cost the global economy US\$10 trillion. These grave effects of the pandemic will mostly affect directly vulnerable groups, most of who are people that rely on the informal economy, women, children, migrants, refugees, and forcibly displaced persons and more generally, low-income households. These group face greater challenges in accessing services such as health, education, and housing and sanitation infrastructure and the disparities in access will be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our work at End Child Poverty towards responding to the COVID-19 pandemic has been well aligned and cognizant of these vulnerable populations, especially children. Since March 2020, we joined fellow initiatives of Arigatou International in instituting the collective '[Faith in Action for Children](#)' campaign that would rally religious leaders and religious communities to increase their actions in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children.

The campaign's core affirmation has been that faith plays a critical role in emergency situations, to strengthen resilience in children and young people; and religious leaders can make a crucial contribution to positively influence millions of followers to protect and affirm children's dignity. The campaign's rallying call has been 12 key recommendations, providing concrete ideas for religious leaders and communities to support, protect and nurture children's physical, socio-emotional and spiritual wellbeing. One of the recommendations specifically targets vulnerable children by aiming to: 'Build Solidarity to Respond to the Needs of the Most Vulnerable Children'. This recommendation has been the hallmark of our response and contribution within this global campaign.

# STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHILDREN'S WELLBEING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As **Arigatou International — End Child Poverty**, our work has always focused on the vulnerable groups, especially children, with the aim of lifting them out of poverty as a way to enable them realize their full human potential.

End Child Poverty has developed and engaged in relevant partnerships, in our day-to-day service and in our current response to COVID-19. These partnerships include accompanying and supporting grassroots organizations, including members of the GNRC and regional youth networks in Africa. They also include our engagement in platforms such as the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty, the Africa Interfaith Initiative on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Moral Imperative to End Extreme Poverty and Realize the SDGs.

The partnerships serve to jointly support, protect and empower children amid this global pandemic, thus enabling a wider reach of our work. These partnerships have also propelled us towards participation in advisory and consultative forums, with a view to protect and uplift vulnerable children in this pandemic. The partnerships also provide viable spaces for advocacy and endorsements of processes aimed at cushioning the vulnerable from the adverse effects of the pandemic.

In responding to this pandemic, we have also adjusted our programs, processes and events to fit the new realities posed by this global pandemic. We have shifted most of our events, operations and processes to online spaces, in order to keep realizing our vision of a world free of child poverty, while keeping communities safe from the COVID-19 disease.

Notably, we will be initiating our “**Together We Can End Child Poverty Worldwide**” call to action, through facilitating online engagement around the 17<sup>th</sup> October International Day for The Eradication of Poverty (IDEP). Further, in collaboration with Arigatou International’s Ethics Education for Children initiative, we shall organize A Children’s Solution Lab, inviting children to develop responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and address child poverty and the underlying ethical challenges, through education.

Together with our partners, we have prepared several online training opportunities, in a bid to enhance faith actor’s capacity towards peacebuilding and social cohesion. These will include a faith leaders training on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), under the nested partnership of the Eastern Africa Regional Peace Program (RPP). We are also working to establish a Children’s Peace Ambassadors Network, as part of the Sudan Social Cohesion Initiative; in conjunction with the Sudan Council of Churches, the Sudan Interreligious Council, **Arigatou International — Ethics Education for Children** and other actors. These actions will ensure we advance our Right to Peace Program, even amid the constraints brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In working to uplift vulnerable children from poverty and



the socio-economic effects of the pandemic, we have closely collaborated with our grassroots partners and networks around the world, especially members of the [Global Network of Religions for Children \(GNRC\)](#). Together with them, we are offering a ray of hope to a number of vulnerable children worldwide.

### 1.1. Bridging the Digital Education Divide by Facilitating Online Learning for Children in Moldova and Peru



Through a member of the GNRC–Moldova, End Child Poverty facilitated the purchase of tablets and acquire Internet access for over 20 children living in poverty, in June 2020. These children had been unable to participate in the online learning program as had been directed by the Ministry of Education in the country, due to lack of internet and internet access gadgets. Having been trained by our partner on the use of the tablets, the children, like their counterparts in the country and many parts of the world, have now been learning online. The children, most of whom are enthusiastic to learn, now have the assurance assured that they would not be left behind even when normal classroom learning resumes. This partnership was occasioned by massive school closures not only in Moldova, but also in most countries in the world, thus turning most learning to online spaces.

Similarly, we are supporting GNRC–Peru to initiate a program aimed at closing the economic gap and promoting equal access to education (especially virtual) for vulnerable children living in remote areas of Peru. The program also targets to promote spirituality and strengthen the resilience of children by promoting their participation and creativity in programs aimed at supporting and protecting them during the COVID-19 pandemic. Implementation of these program areas is currently underway and we will report more progress in the next edition of the newsletter.

These interventions by Arigatou International — End Child Poverty is a way of cushioning children from the adverse effects of COVID-19, as well as ensure children secure their fundamental right to education. Bridging this digital divide is in recognition that education opens more possibilities in children's lives, and is thus a vehicle to pull them out of poverty. More stories about this work can be found on our website.

### 1.2. Youth in Action Supporting their Local Communities in East Africa

As COVID-19 cases in Africa began to soar in May 2020, our youth networks, mainly from the [Youth In Action](#) (the Regional Peace Program) and the African Children and Youth Network for Human Rights/*Réseau des Enfants et Jeunes Africains pour les Droits Humains* ([REJADH](#)), took initiative to educate and support their communities amid the health and economic shocks of the pandemic.

#### 1.2.1. Raising Awareness through the Media

In Tanzania, Youth In Action, led by the GNRC–Tanzania, invested time in awareness creation during this time of COVID-19. They have been encouraging their communities to practice social distancing, hand washing and self-isolation. They are also working with the local government and community based organizations on offering psychosocial support to the affected. Youth leaders have also been actively engaged in social media campaigns and awareness on the pandemic.

Likewise, Youth in Action in Puntland region of Somalia have been working with medical professionals, translators and youth-activists to raise awareness and provide accurate information about the COVID-19

pandemic. This has been through creation of a chat-bot on WhatsApp, which answers frequently asked questions in the community, and also allows people to submit written messages and voice-notes about the pandemic. The bot has been a one-stop shop for accurate and relevant information in the local Somali language, thereby reaching many of the local community. Further, the youth aim to work with local women, youth and religious leaders, to address stigma and misconceptions, and contribute to the wider efforts of fighting COVID-19 in Somalia.

The Semi-Arid Health Initiative, and Silver Lining Kenya, both Youth In Action groups from Northern Kenya, have been working collaboratively to raise awareness about safety measures during the pandemic. The youth have been working closely with the Ministry of Health, local authorities and religious leaders to amplify their message and reach more people in the community. Their work has also had a deliberate focus on people living in refugee camps in Garissa, given that the region hosts the largest refugee camp in the country and the East African region.



### 1.2.2. Safer Practices and Economic Relief

In Kenya, Youth In Action drawn from the Youth Peace Club of Mukuru, Nairobi, have been providing free bars of soap and information on safe hand washing and hygiene, to residents in the informal settlement. The youth worked in partnership with Oxfam, and the telecommunications service provider, Safaricom, to carry out this initiative that has so far benefitted over 500 families and their children. The youth leaders took this effort in response to the worsening economic crisis and in order to attend to the hygiene needs of the residents of Mukuru slums, thus aiming to reduce the spread of the disease.

In Somalia, Youth In Action leaders who are part of the Women Alliance for Peace and Humanity in the country, and pioneers of Siraad Initiative, are raising awareness on COVID-19 among women, especially those living in camps and settlement areas. They have also donated hygiene materials including masks to over 200 vulnerable women to help them during the pandemic. The youth have also sensitized the women on how to use online spaces like WhatsApp in sharing information about COVID-19. They are also producing short awareness videos on the pandemic to be shared with the women and on online spaces.

In addition, Youth In Action leaders from the Lamukani Youth Forum in the Coast of Kenya have been mobilizing fellow youth to locally manufacture liquid soap and distribute to families to enable them wash hands regularly and thus prevent contracting and spreading the disease. While distributing the soap, the youth

have also been raising awareness about the pandemic and health measures that the community can take to stay safe.

In Uganda, Youth In Action led by Action For Fundamental Change and Development (AFFCAD), came up with a relief program to fundraise and buy essentials to donate to families in the informal settlement of Bwaise, Kampala, most of whom have lost their sources of income as a result of the pandemic. The youth have also been collecting stories from members of the community about the effects of the pandemic on their lives.



### 1.3. Socio-Economic Relief for Vulnerable Communities in Nepal and Argentina



Our partner and member of the GNRC in Nepal, the Peace Service Centre, has been working with local organizations in gathering and distributing food to the vulnerable in Nepal, especially within the Saptari group in Western Nepal. The food distribution drive, which began in May 2020, has reached to over 1,000 people and is meant to help families reeling from loss of income sources due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions that adversely impacted informal employment, where most of them gained their income.

Additionally, the Peace Service Center has also been distributing hygiene material to vulnerable children in the country. This action included partnering with an institution for orphaned and vulnerable children, where they donated facemasks, hand sanitizers, soap and

other hygiene material to over 50 children. This hygiene material, coupled up with showing the children how to use them, greatly helped in preventing children from getting exposed to COVID-19, thus remaining healthy. Arigatou International — End Child Poverty has been supporting the Peace Service Centre, through the child-led ‘**Nepal Poverty Solutions**’ program, which has been instrumental in these COVID-19 interventions.

Similarly, the GNRC committee in Argentina has been strategizing its focus areas since May 2020, with a view to support vulnerable families in their community. The committee has since provided basic food support to 451 most vulnerable families within Buenos Aires, the capital of the country. Along with the delivery of food and other basic items, the GNRC also distributed communication awareness on verified information on the prevention of COVID-19. Most of these awareness materials were adopted from the ‘Faith In Action for Children’ campaign, by Arigatou International.

#### Participation in the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty Webinar

In May 2020, we participated in the Coalition’s webinar focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on child poverty in Africa and beyond. The webinar, moderated by experts from various member organizations of the Coalition established that the pandemic would push up to 66 million additional children into extreme poverty globally, Africa would remain the most affected. Moderators and participants in the webinar established that shelter, food security, and education were among the most affected areas concerning children in Africa due to the pandemic.

They noted these areas might accelerate child poverty in the continent. Thus, the webinar highlighted how experience sharing through the webinar would be scaled up to inform policy responses and propose actions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on children living in poverty in Africa. Discussions and outcome of the webinar formed part of our strategic interventions towards cushioning children from the adverse effects of the pandemic in Africa and thus ending child poverty. Some of the presentations during the webinar can be found on the [Coalition website](#).



Global webinar

#### IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILD POVERTY IN AFRICA AND BEYOND



Thursday, May 14, 2020  
9-10:30AM New York / 4-5:30PM Nairobi Time

REGISTER BY MAY 13<sup>TH</sup> AT:  
<https://bit.ly/35kVovE>

# Faith in Action for Children:

## Our response to the Covid-19 Pandemic



### **FOLLOWING CLOSELY INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE FROM YOUR GOVERNMENT**

It is important to follow the updates and advice of your government and health officials regarding the current outbreak of coronavirus disease COVID-19 in your country. Use and disseminate only official information about the Pandemic provided by government sites or the World Health Organization [website](#). There is a lot of disinformation that is counterproductive and hampers efforts to contain the pandemic. Make sure that children are provided with age-appropriate information, and use clear and simple language that does not stigmatize any groups of the population or perpetuate existing stereotypes.

### **SUPPORTING EFFORTS TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN LIVING IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS ARE NOT LEFT BEHIND**

Fragile and conflict-affected states have weak health systems and many are already facing humanitarian crises. Many children in these states have been displaced by conflicts, live in vulnerable conditions, including in camps, informal settlements and on the streets. Many are not in a position to isolate or distance themselves from others or comply with basic hygiene measures, including simply washing their hands. Religious communities can help ensure that deprived children are protected and not left behind. This may include working together with governments and call for global leadership and concerted efforts to prioritize additional funding for fragile contexts, support social safety nets, and access to appropriate washing facilities. Religious communities can also raise awareness and provide appropriate guidance to families on how to improve sanitation conditions and promote hygiene practices to halt the spread of the virus.

### **TEACHING CHILDREN HEALTHY ROUTINES**



Teach children the importance of eating healthy and make handwashing and hygiene fun. Explain to children how to wash hands properly, to cover the mouth when coughing, and to keep physical distance from others. Get proper information from [UNICEF](#) about the Coronavirus and how to protect your children.

## 1.4 End Child Poverty Knowledge Centre's partnership with Sarvodaya and UNICEF

In partnership with the Sarvodaya Shramadna Movement in Sri Lanka, the End Child Poverty Knowledge centre has been offering support to over 500 vulnerable families in the country. Together we further supported the Meethotamulla community within Colombo, Sri Lanka, by providing dry ration food packs to 160 vulnerable families. Similarly, the Knowledge Centre in collaboration with the Batticaloa District (Eastern province of Sri Lanka) and the Sarvodaya Batticaloa Centre supported the distribution of COVID-19 awareness and recreational kits to 350 children from underprivileged households.

Additionally, the Knowledge Centre manager, being part of the UNICEF Religious leaders' platform from Sri Lanka, supported UNICEF and Sarvodaya to develop COVID-19 risk education posters for faith communities in English, Sinhala and Tamil languages. Translation of these posters into local languages enhanced more reach of the awareness posters to the local population in Sri Lanka. The Knowledge Centre manager was also appointed as a steering committee member of the UNICEF U-Report (chatbot to support COVID-19 Risk Communication and Community Engagement) committee, and has been supporting the rollout of the UNICEF U-Report initiative in Sri Lanka.

## ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE TO MITIGATE THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON CHILD POVERTY

Arigatou International — End Child Poverty has participated and organized several webinars to the multi-dimensional impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including its adverse effects on child poverty. We have also used our online spaces, including social media and the End Child Poverty website, to harness and promote relevant information. Our aim is accelerating urgent efforts to prevent children from being thrust deeper into poverty, and at the same time build resilience and prepare for post-recovery efforts.

This forms part of our collective Arigatou International, 'Faith In Action for Children' campaign, at regional, global and country-levels. End Child Poverty will continue to support this work, in addition to the advocacy and grassroots actions aimed at responding to COVID-19 and the needs of vulnerable children.

### Some key webinars in which we participated

1. The impact of COVID-19 on Children's Rights and wellbeing – the role of Faith communities; held on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020, hosted by Arigatou International.
2. The impact of COVID-19 on Child Poverty in Africa and beyond; held on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020, hosted by the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty.
3. How Faith Inspired organizations in Asia are supporting, empowering and protecting children during the COVID-19 pandemic; held on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020, hosted by Arigatou International.
4. Youth in Action: Building Peace and moving Dialogue online; hosted by KAICIID, held on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020,
5. How Faith inspired organizations in Europe are supporting and protecting children during the COVID-19 pandemic; hosted by Arigatou International, held on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

## Urgent Need for Safety Nets for Low Income Families to Stem an Increase in Child Poverty in the Global South

The End Child Poverty Director added his voice to the growing concern on poverty for many families in the Global South. His voice, expressed in form of a blog post was part of a series of blogs (voices) by our partners, Directors of Arigatou International and members of the Arigatou International Advisory council to the 'Faith In Action for Children' campaign.

In the blog, he noted:

*In the Global South, majority of citizens are employed in the informal sector, with women making up the majority of informal workers. The Global South also has high unemployment rates and where there is work it is mostly precarious. Public health measures put in place to curb the spread of the virus also compound cost of living for the poor who work in the informal sector. Many live in informal settlements, where poverty, lack of water, sanitation, and cramped conditions make life even harder. Many live from hand to mouth, without adequate safety nets or significant savings. Low-income families lack disposable cash and cannot stockpile food during lockdowns as they need daily and sustained incomes to meet basic needs. Jobs are being lost and livelihoods destroyed and in these circumstances child poverty will increase dramatically. Many low-income families are doing what they need to do to survive on a day to day basis, but this often puts them at risk of contracting the virus and being arrested for flouting government regulations. Social distancing is not an option for these vulnerable families as they continue to work in environments that place them more at risk of contracting the virus and this is worsened by the prevalence of diseases such as malaria and cholera.*

The impact of COVID-19 on low-income families with children is likely to be more severe in the short term and recovery for these families will take much longer. There is an urgent need to protect the most vulnerable in society from paying the biggest price. Worryingly most economies on the Global South are predominantly informal and lack the fiscal space and financial resources to implement the kind of safety nets and economic stimulus measures being rolled out in the G20 countries.

However, countries in the Global South still have the opportunity to use available resources to put in place urgent measures to mitigate the impact. The COVID-19 pandemic presents governments in the Global South with an opportunity to address the underlying causes of child poverty and policies that have contributed towards family poverty and widened inequalities in their economies.

Full blog can be read [here](#).



## TOGETHER WE CAN END CHILD POVERTY WORLDWIDE: OUR CALL TO ACTION & FURTHER RESPONSE TO COVID-19



'Together We Can End Child Poverty Worldwide' is a call to action by Arigatou International — End Child Poverty. Through this, we work with communities to challenge the root causes of poverty in the human heart and in the structural domains in society. We also initiate and support practical actions to address these drivers of poverty and their consequences. Our call to action is based on the belief that all of society can and must be involved in sustainable efforts towards ending child poverty, and that every meaningful action counts. The core of this effort is children's active and meaningful participation, as well as its community-driven nature. The call to action, *'Together We Can End Child Poverty Worldwide'*, is realized through broad-based partnerships with many individuals and organizations.

End Child Poverty emphasizes community mobilization and engagement, from the grassroots level, building up to the global spaces of decision making. Through this, we build awareness about child poverty and the issues related to child poverty. We also support social activism for necessary changes that empower children and help overcome child poverty. End Child Poverty further supports advocacy and lobbying actions by rights-holders, primarily children, towards responsibility-holders and decision makers. This is envisioned to result in policies, laws and practices that are favorable to the wellbeing and empowerment of all children, as well as outcomes that lead to eradication of child poverty.

Commemorating the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP), marked annually on 17<sup>th</sup> October, forms one of the pillars of this call to action.

## FEATURE

### The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP)

IDEP provides opportunity for concerted efforts by and for people living in poverty, to act on ways to overcome it. It is a day dedicated for individual and collective action, by all communities, including awareness, activism and advocacy actions. This year, IDEP carries the theme, *"Acting Together To Achieve Social And Environmental Justice For All"*.

However, this year, IDEP 2020 comes at a time when the global landscape is experiencing massive socio-economic disruptions that are further exacerbating child poverty, at an accelerated rate; as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has further created an unprecedented strain on social protection systems, including health care and poverty reduction mechanisms, in addition to the lives lost.

Towards IDEP 2020, we will work with our partners in:

1. Promoting awareness on child poverty and how to address it, through online communication, organizing forums and hosting other such related events.
2. Carrying out advocacy and lobbying so that child poverty can be addressed as a priority concern at grassroots, national and global community levels.
3. Initiating community actions towards ending child poverty.

These actions shall be done cognizant of the impacts of COVID-19 on children and child poverty in particular, and with the aim of re-shaping the new landscape caused by COVID-19, towards alleviating child poverty. More about the campaign can be [read here](#).

## CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has presented an opportunity for us to reflect, evaluate our work, and commitment towards children. As Arigatou International — End Child Poverty, we continue to engage communities, creating awareness, and building sustainable partnerships in our effort to end child poverty worldwide. We understand that COVID-19 has made our work more difficult but we are also more committed now for the sake of the children.

**We believe that when we work together with other stakeholders and listen to children, we can End Child Poverty.**

 End Child Poverty  @IIECP  EndChildPoverty\_Arigatou