

# ACT NOW:

Experiences and recommendations of girls and boys in the Asia Pacific region during COVID-19



### **RESEARCH MANAGEMENT TEAM:**

Deepesh Paul Thakur  
Patricio Cuevas-Parra  
Kathrine Rose Yee  
Ariel Odtojan  
Loredana Giuglea

### **WRITTEN BY:**

Karina Padilla  
Rebekkah Bernheim

### **COPYEDITING**

Micah Branaman-Sharma

### **DESIGN & LAYOUT**

Carol Homsí

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### **CHILD AND ADULT SAFEGUARDING CONSIDERATIONS**

World Vision ensured safe and ethical participation of children when they shared their stories, adhering to World Vision's safeguarding protocols. Names of children have been anonymised and changed to ensure confidentiality. All photos were taken and used with informed consent.

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Cho, 17, Mandalay, Myanmar © 2020 Kyaw Thet Tun / World Vision

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## 4 ▶ **Executive Summary**

## 6 ▶ **Introduction**

## 8 ▶ **Background**

The effects of COVID-19 in the Asia Pacific region

## 10 ▶ **Methodology**

Aim and research questions

Sample

Method, data collection and analysis

Limitations

Ethics

## 14 ▶ **Findings**

### 14 ▶ **1- Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people in the Asia Pacific region**

Increased risk of witnessing or experiencing violence

Child labour and work

Child marriage

Online risks

Violence in the community

### 22 ▶ **2- Resilient Responses – facing challenges and creating opportunities**

Following best practices to stop COVID-19

At home with family

- Positive opportunities at home

- Navigating complex home environments in the time of COVID-19

Helping their communities

- Modelling best practices

- Volunteering

- Awareness Raising

- Supporting and encouraging others

### 26 ▶ **3- What's next? Support for children and young people**

Fight the spread of COVID-19

- Supplies

- Accurate information

- Law enforcement

- Medical Support

Protecting children and young people from violence

Including and listening to children and young people

Supporting education

Supporting families

- Provide food

- Support livelihoods

### 32 ▶ **Conclusion and recommendations** "There is an end to every beginning"



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COVID-19 is currently wreaking havoc on countries around the world. The devastating health consequences of the virus are only the tip of the iceberg. The pandemic's indirect impacts, such as loss of livelihoods, school closures and restrictions on travel and socialising have far-reaching effects on children and young people's health, safety, education and well-being. During this period, many children and young people are spending more time at home, with family, and online. In this context, children and young people are at risk of witnessing and/or experiencing violence at home and in their communities, taking part in paid work to help supplement family incomes, early marriage, and encountering online risks. This consultation explores children and young people's views and experiences related to COVID-19 and its secondary impacts. Firstly, it looks at children and young people's perceptions of whether they are facing an increased risk of violence during this period and how they perceive this at home, in their communities and online. Secondly, this consultation investigates the ways in which children and young people are working to help stop the spread of the virus and diminish its secondary impacts.

This consultation was conducted from May to June 2020 using a qualitative interview approach. Listening to children and young people is at the heart of World Vision's child-centred approach and commitment to amplify the voices of children and young people on the world stage. This consultation included 110 children and young people (71 girls and 39 boys) between the ages of 11 and 19 from 10 countries in the Asia Pacific region, including India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Nepal, Myanmar, Laos, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Thailand. The interviews took place in-person with physical distancing, over the phone, and through online platforms and followed the minimum standards for consulting with children and young people developed by the Inter-agency Working Group on Children's Participation.<sup>1</sup>

This report is organised around three themes which emerged from the data. These themes include: (1) the impacts of COVID-19 on children and young people; (2) their resilient responses to these impacts personally and by their families and communities; and (3) the support that children and young people need to be safe, healthy, and help fight the spread of the virus.

Children and young people from across the Asia Pacific region shared examples of violence at home and in their communities, child labour, child marriage, and online abuse. However, it is clear from this consultation that children and young people are not merely victims of the current crisis. Despite the many challenges they face, children and young people shared stories of resiliency and hope, following best practices to stop the spread of COVID-19, navigating complex home environments, and helping vulnerable people in their communities. However, children and young people cannot do this alone, and they expressed the need for practical help in the areas of health, education and family livelihoods. Children and young people also said that they need comprehensive child protection mechanisms and clear avenues to seek support. Moreover, they want to be listened to and have their ideas taken seriously by decision makers. While the challenges children and young people currently face are immense, this consultation highlights countless examples of their resiliency and activism in the face of a complex crisis.

World Vision thus calls on governments, United Nations (UN) agencies, donors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the private sector to take a collaborative approach to support children and young people around the world.



# INTRODUCTION

On 11 March, the World Health Organization (WHO) escalated the COVID-19 outbreak from a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” to a pandemic.<sup>2</sup> The WHO director-general explained that he was “deeply concerned by both the alarming levels of spread and severity, and by the alarming levels of inaction”.<sup>3</sup> This pandemic has affected children and young people, families and communities around the world; between January 2020 and September 2020 there have been 25,602,665 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 852,758 deaths across worldwide.<sup>4</sup>

World Vision is responding to the COVID-19 crisis in 70 countries, and over the next 18 months, the organisation aims to reach at least 72 million people, half of whom are children and young people. World Vision is focusing on countries that have significant pockets of fragility and poverty where children and young people are most at risk, including conflict-affected contexts, urban slums and refugee settings. World Vision’s response is focused on four key areas to help limit the spread of COVID-19 and reduce its impact on vulnerable children and young people and families: (1) scaling up preventative measures to limit the spread of disease, (2) strengthening health systems and workers, (3) supporting children and young people affected by COVID-19, and (4) collaborating and advocating to ensure vulnerable children and young people are protected.

World Vision is a child-focused organisation committed to listening to children and young people and including them in decision-making processes. In the World Vision report, *Children’s voices in times of COVID-19: Continued child activism in the face of personal challenges* (April 2020) that was carried out in 13 countries, including the Philippines and Mongolia, children and young people shared that they had experienced changes in their lives on a massive scale. Respondents highlighted school disruption, emotional distress due to social distancing and increasing poverty as the main impacts. In fact, 91% of the children and young people interviewed reported that they were feeling emotional distress or facing troubling experiences.<sup>5</sup> Despite the challenging situation, children and young people also showed high levels of activism and mobilisation, providing examples of their work towards championing the well-being of their families and communities.<sup>6</sup>

This consultation is part of a global follow-up, aimed at developing a more in-depth picture of children and young people’s views of and experiences during the COVID-19 outbreak. It will provide more insight into children and young people’s experiences and the contributions they are making to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 in the Asia Pacific region.

Participants shared the ways in which the pandemic, and the subsequent measures put in place to quell the spread of the virus, have put children and young people at greater risk of experiencing and witnessing violence and abuse in their families, online and in their communities. Children and young people, however, are not passive victims of the pandemic and its aftermath. In this consultation, participants also shared how they faced the often difficult changes to their daily lives and creatively and innovatively worked to stop the spread of the virus.

With the findings of this consultation, World Vision hopes to contribute to improving the ongoing work of child-focused agencies, decision makers, adult professionals, and children and young people themselves.

Kyaw's family had moved from Myanmar to Thailand for his parents work before the pandemic. The factory has now been shut and they've been unemployed for over five months. © 2020

Winai Sittinukulchai / World Vision



# BACKGROUND



## THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

The spread of COVID-19 has had an impact on millions of families around the world. In the Asia Pacific region, the rapid spread of cases has forced governments to apply lockdown strategies, including school closures, mobility restrictions and social distancing measures. Pre-existing challenges in the region, such as poverty and natural disasters, have compounded the negative impacts on children and young people and their families. For example, the devastation caused by Cyclone Amphan in India and Bangladesh in May 2020 intensified the impact on thousands of families already struggling to cope with the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond the threat of contracting the virus, children and young people are also experiencing secondary impacts. World Vision's rapid assessment report, *Unmasking the impact of COVID-19 on Asia's most vulnerable children*, found that COVID-19 has fully or severely affected the livelihoods of over 70% of parents and/or caregivers.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the report found that loss of livelihoods, the top concern of both rural and urban respondents living in poverty, affected many facets of children and young people's well-being, including their "access to food and nutrition, access to health care and essential medicines, access to hygiene and sanitation facilities, and child protection and safety...added stress on the immediate caregiver [can lead] to increased family violence and punitive discipline when children ask for food".<sup>9</sup>

Domestic violence, especially violence affecting children and young people, is rising due to lockdown. Prior to the pandemic, studies carried out in the region showed that violence against children and adolescents is a common phenomenon that takes various forms, such as physical abuse, corporal punishment and neglect.<sup>10</sup> According to a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) review of East Asia and the Pacific, 17-35% of children in low and lower middle-income countries in the region experienced physical abuse and 22-32% of children and young people have experienced neglect.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, child labour and child marriage are prevalent in the region.<sup>12</sup> UNICEF estimates that roughly a quarter of all children living in East Asia and the Pacific are married by age 18, and about one in 10 children are involved in child labour.<sup>13</sup> Evidence shows that emergency situations increase the prevalence of violence against children and exacerbate the risk factors.<sup>14</sup> For example, as of May 2020, data show that in Bangladesh, beatings of children and young people by parents or guardians had increased 42% with a 40% rise in calls to the child helpline.<sup>15</sup> Based on initial trends, in the recent report, *COVID-19 Aftershocks: A perfect storm*, World Vision estimated an additional three to five million children in Asia would experience violence during the first three months of lockdown.<sup>16</sup>



# METHODOLOGY



*Children are interviewed in Myanmar about their experiences © 2020 Kyaw Thet Tun / World Vision*

WorldVision considers children and young people active social actors capable of interacting with others and shaping their environments, not helpless, hidden victims of this pandemic. Following this premise, the methodology for this consultation included collaboration between adults and young leaders engaged as peer researchers who conducted interviews with other children and young people over online platforms.

## AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This regional child consultation seeks to explore children and young people's views and experiences related to the COVID-19 outbreak, focusing on violence against children and young people and around opportunities to contribute to stopping the spread of the virus. Research questions included:

- How is COVID-19 affecting the lives of children and young people in their countries and communities?
- How are children and young people contributing, or can they contribute, to the fight against the spread of COVID-19?
- Are there children and young people in your community who are facing violence or abuse in this time of COVID-19?

## SAMPLE

This consultation included 110 children and young people (71 girls and 39 boys) between the ages of 11 and 19 from 10 countries across the Asia Pacific region, including India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Nepal, Myanmar, Laos, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Thailand. This report is not representative of the views of all children and young people in the region. However, what this report does do is provide a useful snapshot of what children and young people are thinking and feeling about their experiences living in the time of COVID-19.

## METHOD, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This project used a qualitative interview approach which allowed the research team to capture information about participants' personal meanings and interpretations.<sup>17</sup> Data were collected through interviews conducted via electronic devices and online platforms between May and June 2020. The World Vision team in each country adapted the data collection procedure to the participants' contexts. In each country, children and young people were asked three questions (in addition to the prompt questions used to stimulate the conversation). Participants were asked about their views on the impact of COVID-19, their right to be protected from violence and abuse during this time, and their responses and concerns to fighting the spread of the virus. The research team analysed the interview transcripts to identify emerging themes and patterns mentioned by children and young people.



*Shivmangal, 15, participates in the regional consultation from Mumbai, India © 2020 Alpana Singh / World Vision*

## LIMITATIONS

- This research was based on three open-ended questions. Each question had a series of prompts to gain further insight and detail. Interviewers used their discretion utilising these prompts, and as such, these variations are reflected in the data.
- Given the sensitive and often hidden nature of violence, it is highly likely that children and young people sometimes chose not to answer some questions.
- While the primary aim of the research was to highlight the voices of children and young people, some percentages, based on the responses for each question, are utilised to provide a clearer picture.

## ETHICS

This consultation followed the minimum standards for consulting with children and young people developed by the Inter-agency Working Group on Children's Participation. These principles include transparency, honesty, accountability, provision of a child-friendly environment, equality of opportunity, and the safety and protection of young participants.<sup>18</sup> The project took into account the special considerations required to gain informed consent, ensure confidentiality and anonymity, acknowledge the diverse cultures of the research sites, and refrain from presenting any information that may potentially harm participants.<sup>19</sup> The facilitation team ensured safe and ethical participation of children and young people, strictly adhering to World Vision's safeguarding protocols, including a referral procedure in coordination with local partners engaged in the crisis response. In order to ensure that participation was meaningful, safe and ethical, World Vision staff members facilitated online conversations with the young participants, and they were encouraged to decide on their own whether or not they would participate.



Nomu (bottom), 15, Mongolia shares her experiences during COVID-19 © 2020 Otgonkhue Dashdorj / World Vision

# FINDINGS

Children and young people's views are arranged in three parts. The first section outlines the impacts of COVID-19 on children and young people in the Asia Pacific region and the increased risk they face of witnessing or experiencing violence. The second section considers the ways in which children and young people are responding to these changes in their daily lives. Lastly, the third section spotlights the recommendations of children and young people, highlighting their ideas for ensuring that children's rights are upheld moving forward.

## I. IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

**87%**  
of the  
children and  
young people  
spoke about  
some form  
of violence  
when they  
discussed the  
impact of  
COVID-19

Children and young people shared examples of the ways in which the current global pandemic has increased children and young people's risk of experiencing and witnessing different forms of violence and abuse. Overall, 87% of the children and young people spoke about some form of violence when they discussed the impact of COVID-19; 54% said that children are facing an increase. They did not all share personal experiences of violence, but they did bring examples from their friends and community members. It should be noted that they recognised that the pandemic affects all children and young people differently. The outbreak of COVID-19 highlights existing inequalities in rural, poor, marginalised and indigenous communities who face these challenges with fewer resources and support. Moreover, job losses in urban areas across the Asia Pacific region have led to the migration of urban residents to rural areas, further burdening existing infrastructure and depleting resources in rural areas.<sup>18</sup>

*During the COVID-19 lockdown, rich people easily purchased all kinds of food and other necessary things as they have enough money. But poor people, who have no income and are not getting money, they are not able to purchase necessary things and food for their children. Due to lockdown and loss of family income, parents are frustrated and cannot handle well the concerns of their children. (Lamia, 16, female, Bangladesh)*

*Violence against children takes many forms, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and may involve neglect or deprivation. Violence occurs in many settings, including the home, school, community and over the Internet. Similarly, a wide range of perpetrators commit violence against children, such as family members, intimate partners, teachers, neighbours, strangers and other children. Such violence not only inflicts harm, pain and humiliation on children; it also kills.<sup>21</sup> (UNICEF, 2015)*

## INCREASED RISK OF WITNESSING OR EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE

### VIOLENCE AT HOME

**44%**  
of children  
and young  
people  
spoke about  
an increase  
in violence  
at home, and  
49% talked  
about an  
increase in  
fighting at  
home.

As a result of the current global pandemic, children and young people are spending more time at home. In an environment of heightened stress, children and young people are at greater risk of experiencing or witnessing violence.<sup>22</sup> Almost half (44%) of children and young people spoke about an increase in violence at home, and 49% talked about an increase in fighting at home. In some cases, domestic violence was already taking place inside the home prior to the outbreak of the virus. The increased time children and young people spent isolated at home only intensifies their risk.

*Due to lockdown, parents have no work and no income and resort to negative coping [mechanisms]. As a reaction, some parents . . . punish their children and do not give attention to their children. (Dola, 16, female, Bangladesh)*

Children and young people said that the increase in time spent in shared domestic spaces with other family members under increased stress led to conflict and punishment. Thuzar, a 15-year-old female from Myanmar, said: "Parents beat us with hands and sticks. Adults ask the children to go away when children are playing, complaining of noise." Roma, a 16-year-old female from Bangladesh, said: "Children like to play outside, but now they are unable to go outside to play with friends; that's why they are becoming stubborn and getting punishments from their guardians." These examples align with World Vision's research, which found that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, across the Asia Pacific region:

*24% of parents or caregivers indicated that they had resorted to physical punishment or emotional abuse in the last month . . . while 69% of the children confirmed that their parents or caregivers used physical punishment and/or psychological aggression in the past month.<sup>23</sup>*

Apart from physical abuse, children and young people gave examples of verbal abuse. Myat, a 17-year-old male from Myanmar, explained: "Children get more scolding and shouting by the adults during this time." Similarly, Yachamin, a 17-year-old female from Thailand, said that she has not experienced violence in her family, but she has heard of friends who have experienced verbal abuse: "I've seen it when my friends have been verbally abused by their irrational parents."

Lockdown measures contributed to creating situations where abuse took place. Yeasin, a 15-year-old male from Bangladesh reported that: "One of the girls I know in our area, due to lockdown, had one of her cousins try to abuse her, behave badly, show her an indecent attitude, and try to provoke her."

Children and young people's stories further evidence recent research findings in the Asia Pacific region. In Bangladesh, for example, a national impact and needs assessment was conducted in April 2020 by several stakeholders, including World Vision. That assessment found that:

*beatings by parents or guardians had increased by 42%; that there was a 40% increase of calls to the child helpline; and that 50% of those interviewed said the safety and security of girls was an issue in the lockdown.<sup>24</sup>*

Even when children and young people are not the victims, witnessing violence and abuse in the home can have a profound effect on them. For example, Natthawadee shared her personal experience witnessing violence. She said:

*I have been faced with violence in my family, my drug-addicted brother was in a gun fight with my father. Even though there was no one hurt from that incident, the image and sound from the gunfire are still stuck in my memory. (Natthawadee, 13, female, Thailand)*

According to the existing literature in the region, poverty is one of the drivers for experiencing violence.<sup>25</sup> Several young people also highlighted that these risks are greater in families experiencing economic stress. For example, Jirawong, a 15-year-old male from Thailand, said: "The violence in my community is caused by a lack of financial resources and other resources. This also led to domestic violence and a fight within one family which affected their 5-year-old child." Economic hardship was frequently mentioned by participants as a risk factor that may lead children and young people to experience or witness domestic violence. Lamia, a 16-year-old female from Bangladesh, said: "Parents during this corona[virus] period are in bad mood due to less or poor income. So, they hit their children for no reason at all."

Moreover, families' economic hardships are increasingly leading to a failure to meet children and young people's basic needs. For instance, Loud, a 16-year-old male from Laos, said: "We can't work; we don't have income. We can't go out to buy foods, [so we] don't have enough food during lockdown." Lamiya also shared her experience:

*Most of the families now have no income so they are suffering from malnutrition because they do not have enough food. Beside our house there is a nut seller; seven members of his family depend on him. During the COVID-19 situation, his income source has stopped. He has a 7-month-old child who needs supplementary food now and is suffering from malnutrition. (Lamiya, 15, female, Bangladesh)*

A participant from Sri Lanka mentioned that in his community children and young people are also facing difficulties meeting their needs:

*Our area was in lockdown for months. Our parents couldn't go to their jobs due to curfew. So, we faced household economic problems. There were days that we couldn't eat all three meals. I even knew a few friends who had to skip all three meals of the day. It was a very difficult period, but somehow, we survived. (Pradeep, 17, male, Sri Lanka)*

## CHILD LABOUR AND WORK

*I have heard news about children who have been abused during this lockdown period. Some of them have been used for child labour [or] dispersal of drugs while some have been facing problems, like domestic violence, which has been affecting them mentally. (Manita, 15, female, Nepal)*

### PAID WORK

Child labour is an existing problem in the Asia Pacific region.<sup>26</sup> According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), in South Asia alone, there are 16.7 million children and young people between the ages of 5 and 17 years old taking part in child labour.<sup>27</sup> Child labour is defined as "work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to their physical and mental development".<sup>28</sup>

According to Shivmangal, a 15-year-old male from India, children and young people who were previously working have lost their jobs, further contributing to the financial difficulties families now face.

The socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic have also increased the risk that children and young people will get involved in child labour. For example, World Vision's rapid assessment report, *Unmasking the impact of COVID-19 on Asia's most vulnerable children* found that: "Loss of livelihood is forcing parents and caregivers to take desperate actions that are negatively impacting the well-being of children, with 6% of caregivers sending their children to work" and "8% sending their children to beg."<sup>29</sup>

**47%**  
had to  
stop their  
schoolwork  
or other  
learning in  
order to  
work to help  
their family  
survive  
during the  
pandemic.

When asked if they, or some other child or young person, had to stop their schoolwork or other learning in order to work to help their family survive during the pandemic, 47% (24 out of 51 of the children and young people who responded to the question) said yes. Several respondents mentioned that increased financial pressures at home during this time led them to look for jobs.

*A lot of children during this time are involved in child labour. There are many children who are selling vegetables on the streets. The parents have not been able to go to work, and this has affected the economy of the family. This is putting them at a great risk as they are alone on the streets and could be kidnapped or face some other child protection issues. (Sheetal, 15, female, India)*

One respondent, Tsend-Ayush, said children and young people would prefer to spend their time playing or doing other activities:

*I know many of my friends are working to help out their parents. In our town, we can work at vegetable growing fields and chicken farms. I work at the vegetable greenhouses and growing fields. We work eight hours a day, and if it rains, we stay at home. I wish we could play at sports courts. In my school, we have two basketball courts, but now they are closed. (Tsend-Ayush, 14, male, Mongolia)*

Another young participant, Khant, also shared this example:

*Due to the difficult condition of the households, some children work in road construction, which is very dangerous for them. Although they are aware that they need to wear masks to prevent from [catching] COVID-19, they can't afford to buy it. They only concentrate on their work to get money and are no longer interested in school lessons. (Khant, 14, male, Myanmar)*

## CARING AND HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

For some children and young people, the increased time at home led to increased domestic responsibilities. Contributing to household chores and watching younger siblings was seen by some participants as a way of supporting their families during this crisis. Misheel, a 16-year-old female from Mongolia, said: "I ask my friends to stay at home and help out their parents [when they] go to work, like by babysitting their little brothers and sisters, cooking, and cleaning their house." Similarly, Maralgua, a 15-year-old female from Mongolia, said: "Children need to stay home and take care of their brothers and sisters."

Like paid labour, the extra burden of housework and childcare, in some cases, kept young people (mostly young women) from completing their education. Eshika, a 12-year-old female from India, said: "I have a friend who does most of the domestic work [in her house] instead of engaging in her studies." Moreover, not all children and young people who faced extra housework during this period were willing to do it.

*Parents doubt whether their children are using their online time sincerely. They are forcing children to do household work since schools are closed and we are at home all the time. The work is sometimes an extra burden on us. There is more mental pressure on us than physical. (Nousin, 14, female, India)*

## CHILD MARRIAGE

**49%**  
of the  
children and  
young people  
spoke about  
an increase in  
child marriage  
in their  
communities.

South Asia is home to the largest number of child brides; 285 million individuals wed before the age of 18, over 40% of the global burden. East Asia and Pacific ranks third, with 75 million child brides, representing 12% of the global burden. While the practice of child marriage has declined globally, especially in South Asia, no region in Asia Pacific is on track to eliminate the practice by 2030.<sup>30</sup> Sadly, 49% of the children and young people spoke about an increase in child marriage in their communities. In some countries, the proportion was even higher:

Child marriage puts children and young people at a greater risk of experiencing sexual and physical violence.<sup>31</sup> Karishma, a 17-year-old female from India, said that, while she had not heard of anyone in her community being subjected to child marriage recently, “some parents discuss getting their daughters married off early, before they are eligible to get married, and because many families went through hardships due to lockdown, parents might think of this option”, drawing a link between the increased financial hardship many families are facing during this time and child marriage rates. Similarly, Naimul, a 15-year-old male from Bangladesh, connected the economic motivation behind both child marriage and child labour: “Poverty is forcing many parents to marry off their children at an early age. They are being persecuted, too. Poverty is the prime cause of these issues. I think COVID-19 has increased child marriage and child labour.”

Some children and young people who participated in this consultation warned that lockdowns may make hiding child marriage easier. In Bangladesh, 67% [eight out of 12] of children and young people said that child marriage is an issue that they had heard about or were worried about more than before the onset of COVID-19. Much of this concern stemmed from the even more hidden nature of child marriage due to the current situation. Ashura, a 17-year-old female from Bangladesh, said: “During this time, we are worried about hidden child marriage . . . because we are not going outside and into the community . . . [so] child marriage is happening secretly, without others noticing it.” Similarly, Lamia, a 16-year-old female from Bangladesh, commented: “Presently, due to the lockdown, child marriage is not happening openly, but it is still going on.”

In Indonesia, child marriage is a hidden issue because marriages often go unregistered.<sup>32</sup> Sekar recounted:

*There are some children here who [have an unregistered marriage based on sharia law]; about three people also got married in the middle of this pandemic. I'm more worried for the future of the child or her parents, especially since she's still a child who, at her age, should go to school instead of getting married. If she drops out of school, I'm worried how her education will be and her dreams. (Sekar, 16, female, Indonesia)*

In Nepal, 50% of the participants [six out of 12] shared examples of child marriage from their communities during the pandemic period. Asim, a 17-year-old male from Nepal, reported: “There has been abuse of some kind during this period. There were two cases of child marriages and two cases of sexual abuse. There is a fear that we might also be victims of violence.”

## ONLINE RISKS

Children and young people are also spending more time online during lockdowns. The reasons for this are threefold: for school, entertainment, and to keep in touch with friends.

This increased time on the Internet can be both positive and negative. After schools closed across Asia Pacific, many countries opted to deliver lessons through online platforms. Online resources provide significant opportunities for maintaining children and young people's learning and keep them connected with their peers and teachers. However, increased time spent online may significantly increase children and young people's exposure to risks, such as being contacted by strangers, cyberbullying, or viewing inappropriate content. For example, during lockdown, the Philippines' Office of Cybercrime in the Department of Justice reported a 264% increase in reported sexual exploitation of children and young people online.<sup>33</sup>

**42%**  
[28 out of 66 of children and young people who answered the question] had seen inappropriate (i.e. sexual) content online.

When asked if they or their friends had seen inappropriate (i.e. sexual) content online, 42% [28 out of 66 of children and young people who answered the question] said yes. Several children and young people in Thailand reported similar experiences:

*I've been using a lot more Internet, and I've seen inappropriate content on Facebook. (Ratnarin, 17, female)*

*I've been using my cell phone a lot. Sometimes I even came across some inappropriate posts. (Teeradate, 14, male)*

*I've been on the social media a lot lately. I sometimes find inappropriate content. (Natthawadee, 13, female)*

Not only have children and young people in Thailand been exposed to inappropriate content online, but many have also been approached by scammers or strangers. Yachamin, a 17-year-old female from Thailand, reported: "I've been approached by some scammers and strangers on Facebook, but I did not respond. My friends have also been in the same situation."

These risks are in no way limited to Thailand; children and young people face online risks across the Asia Pacific region. Altanchimeg, a 16-year-old female from Mongolia, recounted: "We receive posts and videos on Facebook that are not age appropriate; for example, [they say] 'wanted financial support'. I think this is like prostitution." Another young participant conveyed something similar:

*I also heard that a friend was looking for a part-time job online. She is about my age. When she asked, "what is the job", the guy on Facebook said to her, "You will get 200k tögrög (US\$80) just for meeting a guy, and if he likes you, he will give you more." I think that guy asked for sex and wants to pay her once a day. This kind of job offer comes to girls' PMs [private messages] very often. We just have to make sure to block that person. (Misheel, 16, female, Mongolia)*

Cyberbullying also arose as an issue that children and young people were facing. When asked if, since the start of COVID-19, they or their friends had posted something "bad" online about their peers, 29% [16 out of 55 of the respondents] said yes. Atcharee, a 17-year-old female from Thailand, explained: "Even though there is the COVID situation, it is still the same in terms of physical and emotional abuse and bullying in school for being fat or having a darker skin colour."

However, many participants chose to ignore it or attributed it to their friends just trying to be funny. Wanwisa, a 15-year-old female from Thailand, said: "I've been cyberbullied by my friends, but I never pay any attention to it." Tun, a 15-year-old male from Myanmar, shared his experience: "When I used Facebook, someone sent me a friend request that I accepted. It was a normal chat in the beginning, but later he chatted nonsense and sent videos. I was scared and blocked that account."

## VIOLENCE IN THE COMMUNITY

Children and young people involved in this consultation shared their views about the impacts of the pandemic on their communities. For instance, participants shared examples of robberies and alcohol consumption in their neighbourhoods. Natthawadee, a 13-year-old female from Thailand, stated: "Some people are taking a negative advantage during this COVID-19 situation, such as robbery, which can lead to violence against children." Nyamdalai, a 17-year-old male from Mongolia, shared a similar experience that happened in his neighbourhood. He said: "Everyone is wearing mask, so I heard there are many crimes of robbery because they are wearing face masks anyway."

Alcohol abuse is another driver of violence against children and young people. Children and young people also shared examples of when they were asked by parents to purchase alcohol, Thuzar reported:

*We felt unsafe and worried when [our] father forced us to buy alcohol because, at the liquor house, there are drunk people, and I feel scared. When I am asked to buy cigarettes and betel or to go somewhere for any reason at night, I am afraid because it is dark at night. (Thuzar, 15, female, Myanmar)*



Emma, 16, shares her COVID-19 experiences in Demoso, Myanmar © 2020 Kyaw Thet Tun / World Vision



## 2. RESILIENT RESPONSES: FACING CHALLENGES AND CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

*“Children and young people can contribute to fight against COVID-19 by different ways. First, I have to start from myself. I have to be safe first then I can help others be safe too.” (Sital, 18, Female, Nepal).*

Children and young people’s interview responses give evidence to their capacity as active and engaged citizens. Children and young people are aware that they can contribute to making a significant difference through individual and collective actions in their families and communities. This section looks at the ways in which children and young people are responding to the challenges created by the pandemic, and how they are working towards improving their own lives and the lives of those around them.

### FOLLOWING BEST PRACTICES TO STOP COVID-19

*Children and young people can contribute to the fight against COVID-19 in different ways. First, I have to start with myself. I have to be safe first, then I can help others be safe too. (Sital, 18, female, Nepal)*

Children and young people are personally taking action to fight the spread of COVID-19, and this section outlines some of the ways in which they are addressing new or heightened challenges to their safety.

Children and young people are following current best practices to stop the spread of the virus in their communities (i.e. staying home, practising social distancing and following government guidelines regarding mask usage and handwashing). In India, Bangladesh, Laos, the Philippines, Mongolia, and Indonesia, 50% or more of the participants interviewed said that children and young people can fight the spread of COVID-19 by staying at home. A few young people in Bangladesh likened their efforts to stopping the spread of COVID-19 to the liberation war of 1971. According to Dola, a 16-year-old female from Bangladesh: “We can tell our parents and children that our grandfathers fought for the freedom of our country in 1971, and now we can say that we can save our country by staying at home.”

Children and young people are following guidance to reduce the spread of the virus, even if it is a challenge for them. For instance, Sheeta said:

*Relationships have remained the same and strong but there is always a social fear. Even when friends and relatives come home, we welcome them but maintain distance and request them to sanitise themselves. We used to hug our friends when we met, but now, we just wave our hands from a distance. (Sheeta, 15, female, India)*

In India, Laos, the Philippines, Nepal, Myanmar, Thailand, Mongolia, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka, 50% or more of the children and young people interviewed spoke about the importance of practising good hygiene to slow the spread of the virus. As Katarina, a 15-year-old female from Indonesia, stated: “We must remember our health. We must take care of our health, such as always wearing a mask when going out of the house, washing our hands, and always keeping our distance from others.”

However, following these guidelines can be challenging for children and young people; for example, in communities with little or no running water, handwashing is difficult. In the case of Prekchya, a 14-year-old female from Nepal, she reported that: “We are not able to translate some of these into practice; maintaining social distancing is challenging. Due to the lack of soaps and sanitisers, we are [also] not able to maintain personal hygiene well.”

## AT HOME WITH FAMILY

### POSITIVE OPPORTUNITIES AT HOME

Children and young people are not only victims of the global crisis. They thoughtfully reflected on the current pandemic, and how it has affected their lives and those of their families and friends. The young respondents shared positive experiences as a result of spending more time with family due to the stay-at-home guidance. For example, Shivmangal, a 15-year-old male from India, commented: "I do miss my friends, but [I am] happy spending time with my family." Similarly, Umashi had a positive experience at home with her family:

*COVID gave family members an opportunity to stay together for a long period. We helped our parents to do home gardening and other household work. Siblings got together at home and tried to continue their education together with the guidance from [their] parents. (Umashi, 15, female, Sri Lanka)*

Dharshika, an 11-year-old female from India, said that a positive aspect of lockdown was that she was able to spend lot of time with her parents, and her mom taught her games and crafts.

### NAVIGATING COMPLEX HOME ENVIRONMENTS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

**95%**  
knew whom  
to tell or ask  
for help if they  
were feeling  
unsafe or  
threatened by  
violence.

Children and young people may experience an increased risk of violence in their homes, particularly because of increased overall stress on families during this time. When asked whether they or their friends knew whom to tell or ask for help if they were feeling unsafe or threatened by violence, 95% of respondents [73 out of 77] replied yes. For example, Shobhana commented:

*We children have learned from World Vision how to [ask for] support for protection during the time of danger situations, abuse, and violence; that the child helpline [number is] 1098; [about the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights] NCPCR; police; [to have] five [trusted adults for our safety] network; and the three safety rules that say, 'No!' 'Go!' and 'Tell!'. (Shobhana, 14, female, India)*

However, another young participant, Chantsaldulam, a 15-year-old female from Mongolia, responded that: "If something happens to me, I will tell my friends. I don't think I will tell the police or my mom."

Conversely, some children and young people did not know who to tell if they witnessed or experienced violence. One boy said:

*When children are feeling unsafe or threatened, at that time, family can take the main lead to save us from the situation. I am also taking support from my family when feeling unsafe. But, if any children [experience] violence or abuse at home, then they do not know where they can go for help. Even I don't know where I can go for support outside of my family. (Shahariar, 17, male, Bangladesh)*

From these examples, it is clear that children and young people face a variety of different opportunities and challenges at home because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Increased time at home allows for more time with family, which, for some children and young people, is a positive, but for others poses significant challenges.

From these examples it is clear children and young people face a variety of different opportunities and challenges at home as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. Increased time at home allows for more time with family, which, for some children and young people is a positive, but for others poses significant challenges.

## HELPING THEIR COMMUNITIES

This section spotlights the varied and creative ways children and young people are helping their communities, despite the risks and challenges they face.

### VOLUNTEERING

In response to the global pandemic, children and young people are leveraging their resources to help educate their families, friends and communities to help fight the spread of the virus. Children and young people also volunteered for different organisations, for example, to distribute food parcels, deliver masks and provide hand sanitiser. Children and young people from India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Nepal, Mongolia, and Indonesia all shared that they took part or were planning on taking part in volunteer activities in their communities to fight the spread of COVID-19.

### AWARENESS RAISING AND MODELLING BEST PRACTICES

*[I am] telling parents and other people that I know how to prevent and protect ourselves from COVID-19 by washing hands with soap or alcohol gel, wearing masks and not going out to meet many people in the community. (Loud, 16, male, Laos)*

Children and young people said that they shared updated guidance to slow the spread of COVID-19 with their parents and siblings. For example, Dharshika, an 11-year-old female from India, stated that “if my parents go out and come in, I ask them to wash their hands and wash all fruits and vegetables”. Children and young people are thus using their access to information to share what they learn online and from organisations, such as World Vision, to teach their family members.

Half or more of all participants in India, Bangladesh, Laos, the Philippines, Nepal, and Myanmar had either taken part in awareness-raising activities or were planning to do so. Nur, a 17-year-old male from Bangladesh, said: “As we are children, we don’t have any option to use finances to fight COVID-19, but we can contribute differently by sharing information with others.”

Children and young people have the opportunity to lead their communities on how to follow current safety guidance when shops, restaurants and places of worship reopen. In Indonesia, for example, Lestari, a 15-year-old female, said: “Children and teenagers can ... encourage others to use masks, wash their hands and keep their distance from each other.”

Awareness raising was carried out in a variety of ways by the young respondents, depending on the resources available to them. Participants from both India and Bangladesh shared how they created posters to place around their communities to raise awareness:

*Children's club members are creating awareness in neighbouring children's families and within their community [about how to] wash their hands properly for 20 seconds and [informing] them to cover their faces with masks and maintain social distancing. In addition, youth and children are constantly putting their efforts towards making placards, posters and drawings to spread the message of "stay home, stay safe" and "do not visit others". Some children are preparing homemade masks and distributing them to children in their families free-of-cost so that people can become more and more aware. In this way, children are collectively contributing to fighting against the spread of COVID-19. (Sonam, 16, female, India)*

In Bangladesh, most of children and young people interviewed said that they had or were planning on raising awareness online through social media platforms. Take Ammeet, a 16-year-old male, for example, he stated: "Children and youths can disseminate awareness messages on COVID-19 using different social media, messenger groups, Facebook, mobile messages, etc. using the Internet while staying at home."

Children and young people also had many other creative ideas for raising awareness. For example, Natthawadee, a 13-year-old female from Thailand, reported that she "would like to organise a seminar on COVID-19 information and safety procedures".

### REACHING MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

*During this pandemic period, I want the government to better protect children with disabilities, like me, to not be discriminated against. I hope the government helps to look back and helps me to go to school again because I want to be a police officer. (Charles, 16, male, Indonesia)*

Children and young people were especially concerned that messages and guidelines were not reaching the most marginalised or particularly vulnerable groups, including disabled people, indigenous communities, and those living in poverty. Karishma also stated that she wanted to do what she could to help the homeless and migrant workers by:

*spreading awareness about COVID-19, to those who live on the streets and the migrant workers, about how to stay safe by following all the safety measurements – [e.g.] washing hands with soap, wearing masks, maintaining social distancing. The children and youth together reached out to them with messages on posters and provided food to them as well. (Karishma, 17, female, India)*

### SUPPORTING AND ENCOURAGING OTHERS

Children and young people shared their experiences and ideas to inspire and encourage people in their communities, including frontline workers and people from poor or marginalised communities, despite the challenges they faced in their own lives. For example, Tawan, an 18-year-old from Thailand, said: "I also wrote thank you notes and recorded a video clip to send in support of the health-care providers, doctors and nurses." Similarly, Cyril, a 17-year-old male from the Philippines, had many ideas about how to "incite positivity" during the pandemic. He suggested: "Our organisation can organise virtual online contests, like creating poems, essays or posters about COVID that will pay tribute to our front-liners and incite positivity amongst the youth during this pandemic."

## 3.

## WHAT'S NEXT? SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

During their interviews, children and young people shared what resources they needed to continue their efforts to fight against the spread of COVID-19 and provided suggestions to their countries' leaders on how their governments could help support and protect children and young people in the time of COVID-19. From these replies, five themes emerged. These included: (1) fighting the spread of COVID-19, (2) protecting children and young people from violence, (3) including and listening to children and young people, (4) supporting education and (5) supporting families. Here are a few of their ideas in their own words.

### FIGHT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

When children and young people were asked what they would like their president or head of state to do for children and young people in their country during this period, they had many ideas. Some said they wanted their governments to provide their communities with more supplies to help stem the spread of the virus. They also called on their countries' leaders to work towards ensuring that sufficient advocacy work is done so that all people are aware of how to limit further transmission of the virus. Some children and young people also expressed their support of the use of law enforcement to ensure people follow governmental guidance on social distancing and wearing masks. Lastly, children and young people want their governments to find a more long-term solution to the current crisis, that is, find a vaccine for the virus.

#### SUPPLIES

Many children and young people spoke about the need for more supplies in their communities to fight the spread of COVID-19. Masks, hand sanitiser and soap were frequently mentioned as items in short supply or simply too expensive. According to World Vision's recent rapid assessment of the Asia Pacific region:

*While 61% of respondents confirmed that hygiene supplies (soap, detergent, etc.) were always available in the market, 59% found these good to be unaffordable. Furthermore, 34% did not have access to clean water for [household] cleaning purposes.<sup>35</sup>*

Supplies were viewed as beneficial because they help protect children and young people but also because they enable them to do more to serve their communities. Thiraviyam, a 15-year-old female from Sri Lanka, said: "If we have financial support, we can provide masks for poor people." Similarly, Hnin, a 15-year-old female from Myanmar, reported that: "We need trash bins, gloves, and rubbish bags [for] when we collect rubbish in the village."

#### ACCURATE INFORMATION

In a recent World Vision report conducted in the Asia Pacific region with parents and caregivers, children and young people, and key informants, "92% of respondents confirmed that they have adequate and regular updates and information about COVID-19".<sup>36</sup> According to these findings, the key channels in which respondents received COVID-19 updates included "television and radio (66%), family, friends, and relatives (37%), and social media (32%)".<sup>37</sup> In spite of this high percentage of people reached, children and young people still said that more information and advocacy work are needed to make people aware of how to lower the risk of contracting the virus.

One young woman from the Philippines, Lisa, a 15-year-old female, stated: "I want to know if there is already a vaccine for this virus. Also, I want to know more [about] if it is already safe to go back to school."

Shahariar, a 17-year-old male from Bangladesh, also highlighted a knowledge gap between rural and urban populations. He encouraged his government to "ensure health services for the citizens of cities and villages because village children are less aware than city children are". This knowledge gap could, in part, be attributable to a lack of Internet access in rural and remote areas as well as vulnerable children and young people living in slums. To continue their efforts to spread awareness online, children and young people need access to affordable and reliable Internet. According to Yeasin, a 15-year-old male from Bangladesh, in order to reach the widest possible audience "[the] government can take initiatives to raise awareness of community people using different online/offline media".

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

Children and young people asked for their governments to support stopping the virus through law enforcement. Several children and young people commented on how they wanted the lockdown rules governments set to be strictly enforced. Chethana, a 15-year-old female from Sri Lanka, said: "We would like to request authorities to keep spreading health guidelines and strictly enforcing laws to punish people violating them."

## MEDICAL SUPPORT

Children and young people urged their countries' leaders to find a vaccine for the virus and provide free and comprehensive health care for children and young people who contract the virus. According to World Vision's recent rapid assessment of the Asia Pacific region:

*Access to basic health services has drastically decreased (pre- and post-COVID-19), especially for urban dwellers, increasing the risk of maternal and child morbidity and mortality. Access to hospital services has decreased by 27% (34% for urban respondents); access to community health centres has decreased by 30% (34% for urban respondents); access to maternal centres has decreased by 21% (27% for urban respondents); and access to outreach services has decreased by 16% (23% for urban respondents).<sup>38</sup>*

Lestari, a 15-year-old female from Indonesia, stated: "I want Mr President to continue to monitor the condition of children in Indonesia. And if there are children who are [positive for] COVID-19, [I want them] to be treated properly, free of charge."



## PROTECT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FROM VIOLENCE

*I want children's groups to receive training for child protection. (Paw, 15, female, Myanmar)*

Children and young people are not just victims that need to be protected but are also creative and vocal advocates with ideas on how to create safer and more supportive communities. In light of their concerns regarding their peers' increased risk of experiencing or witnessing violence, children and young people recommended increased governmental support in response to children and young people's efforts to stop violence in their communities. Lamia, a 16-year-old female from Bangladesh, summed this up when she called on her government to: "Take action and address the violence cases."

So many children are facing violence during the period of COVID-19 and becoming mentally nervous. Get the suggestions and recommendations from children and youths.”

Children and young people especially want governments to ensure that community-based child protection systems are functional, such as child helplines. Ameet, a 16-year-old male from Bangladesh, suggested that the government should “make, or ensure functioning of, all child-related helplines because currently children’s helplines do not function well”. He also suggested that the government could “create new helplines specifically for children and make functional the children’s help desk in all police stations”. He thought they could also “establish a separate thana-based [i.e. at each police station] helpline to address children’s cases” and “ensure [there is a] counselling programme [available] at all levels, especially for the poor, [most vulnerable children] MVC, and affected children, for their recovery”.

## INCLUDE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION MAKING

*Government can involve and engage enthusiastic youths and children. It would be better to work together. (Lamia, 16, female, Bangladesh)*

Children and young people want their voices heard by their countries’ decision makers, and they want to be involved in the decision-making process. Moreover, they want their views to be respected and taken seriously. Ameet, a 16-year-old male from Bangladesh, stated: “Our opinions, suggestions and recommendation must be acknowledged by others. Respect and give importance to our participation and opinions.” Cyril, a 17-year-old male from the Philippines, echoed this sentiment: “The government should listen to the concerns of children and youth and not take us for granted, for we are one of the affected sectors during the pandemic.”

## SUPPORTING EDUCATION

The children and young people who took part in this research spoke of their desire to resume safe and accessible education as soon as possible. Dheeraj, a 16-year-old male from India, said: “We want to tell the leaders of our country to start our education system as soon as possible. Our message to the government is that if the lockdown is being extended, online education should be started for us.”

Where in-person classes are not possible, children and young people called for online, radio or TV-based lessons.

*During lockdown, TV is one of the main sources of enjoyment for children. So, . . . I would like to request that the state government . . . make channels, which are related to children, free. And can they make interactive programmes for children, like e-learning and other knowledgeable programmes? It’s also a request that, if possible, the state government can start story sessions for small children on weekly basis so that children can stay inside [their] home and can contribute to the fight against the spread of COVID-19. (Shivmangal, 15, male, India)*

A respondent from Myanmar also recognised the boredom that some children and young people face while out of school. She said:

*It will be good for children to have books before schools reopen. My younger siblings are getting bored [during the] long stay at home and want to go outside. So, it is better to provide them drawing books and other books to read. (Emma, 16, female, Myanmar)*

In countries where online education is available, challenges still exist. Children and young people from across the Asia Pacific region pointed out that poor, rural and indigenous communities are disproportionately disadvantaged due to difficulties accessing the Internet and devices. Dulakshi, a 16-year-old female from Sri Lanka, asked: “My request to the elders and the president of our country is to supply us Wi-Fi facilities so that we can use it for our educational purposes at home.” Some respondents highlighted the inequalities between rural and urban communities in Thailand. They reported that:

*I want to let them know that the indigenous people have no Internet access and should provide them one. (Jirawong, 15, male)*

Even for those families who do have access to Internet and electricity, challenges remain. Kultinee raised an issue that many large families are facing:

*I want our [prime minister] PM to reconsider the online classes because not everyone has enough resources to take the online class; for example, if there are four students in one household but only one TV, how can everybody access the online classroom at once? (Kultinee, 17, female, Thailand)*

Children and young people want their governments to restart education as soon as possible; however, they want this to be done in a way that is safe and equitable.

## SUPPORTING FAMILIES

*I want the work to resume for daily workers. I want the country's leaders to provide money and food items for poor families and to help to end COVID-19 quickly. (Thin, 16, female, Myanmar)*

Children and young people recognise the financial impact of the pandemic on their families. Loss of income means parents have difficulties providing food for their children. Children and young people are asking their governments to provide food, regulate the price of food, and/or provide financial assistance to families so children and young people do not go hungry.

### PROVIDE FOOD

An aspect that children and young people mentioned was that they wanted to call on their governments to provide food and other basic resources, especially to families who are poor. Sital, an 18-year-old female from Nepal, said in her interview that the “government needs to roll out a food relief package for the families affected by the lockdown”.

## SUPPORT LIVELIHOODS

Aside from basic food assistance, several children and young people called for governmental regulation of food prices to support families' incomes. For example, one young respondent suggested:

*[The] government should give food assistance that is enough for the all the members of the whole family and will last a long time. I also hope that the price of fish [in my community] will be regulated by the government so that fishermen will still earn enough. (Oliver, 14, male, the Philippines)*

Children and young people asked their country's leaders for more financial support for families, particularly those who are poor and currently without any income. The loss of family income was a challenge echoed by Natthawadee:

*I want the government to help with every family's income; they should try to take a look at all the rural areas, not only in the inner-suburban areas. We've seen some families lose their source of income and so on. There is now a lack of resources and help. (Natthawadee, 13, female, Thailand)*

Financial assistance was not seen as a panacea by all the children and young people who took part in the research as money is not always spent on food. Montitha, a 17-year-old female from Thailand, said: "I think that financial aid by cash distribution is not the best solution. Money cannot fix everything." Tun, a 15-year-old male from Myanmar, reiterated this point saying: "I want all the liquor shops to close. I want the assistance to reach those in need effectively."



Roma, 16, shares her experiences during lockdown over a video call in Kaharole, Bangladesh © 2020 Margaret Madhu / World Vision



# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**“THERE IS AN END TO EVERY BEGINNING”**

*I want to tell our children and youth not to worry too much. There is an end to every beginning. We have to be patient for everything to come back to normal. I want to be able to go out and help the youth again. (Atcharee, 17, female, Thailand)*

What has come across clearly in this study is that children and young people are ready and willing to play their part in fighting the spread of COVID-19. In addition to highlighting how they and their peers have been affected by the crisis, children and young people are also working to respond, but they need support from their governments, UN agencies, donors, NGOs and the private sector to do so. They are not only beneficiaries but are also rights-holders. Relevant stakeholders must create an environment where child rights are protected and children and young people are included as actors in their own right.

Children and young people highlighted four key areas in which they need support. Firstly, they want to be listened to, included in decision-making, and equipped with practical help to fight the spread of COVID-19. This includes more supplies, access to accurate and up-to-date information on the virus, and support from medical professionals and law enforcement. Secondly, they need support to ensure all children and young people are protected from violence, including preventing child marriage and child labour. Thirdly, children and young people want support to continue their education. Finally, they want support for their families and their countries' most vulnerable families to earn an income and provide for their children.

The following section shares their thoughts in the four areas, as well as World Vision's own recommendations to ensure that children and young people are active participants, protected, educated and have their basic needs of survival and development fulfilled throughout this crisis.

## CHILDREN MUST BE LISTENED TO, INCLUDED IN DECISION-MAKING, AND EQUIPPED WITH PRACTICAL HELP TO FIGHT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19.

*I would like to thank our government for their initiative to stop the spread of COVID-19 infections. I would like to make a humble request to our prime minister and upazila [administrative regional] governments to include us or other children in the COVID-19 committee. Though we will not be able to support financially, we will be able to cooperate by sharing our ideas. (Nur, 17, male, Bangladesh)*

*The government should listen to the concerns of children and youth and not take us for granted, for we are one of the affected sectors during the pandemic. (Cyril, 17, male, the Philippines)*

*We need more information on how to prevent and protect from COVID-19 in villages and communities. [The] government should provide materials to prevent and protect from COVID-19, like masks, soap, and alcohol hand gel for children and people living in communities. (Miss Soud, 13, female, Laos)*

*The support and resources that the children and youth will be needing is a trained professional ... to help them learn more about the ways of preventing the COVID-19 issues. (Kamal, 16, male, Nepal)*

- **Provide age-appropriate information to ensure that children and young people, families and communities are aware of the changing COVID-19 situation and the measures being undertaken.** This includes accounting for populations with no or little Internet access in hard to reach rural areas and indigenous communities.
- **Recognise and embrace children and young people as rights-holders and social actors with capabilities to contribute to stopping the spread of COVID-19.** This includes utilising appropriate strategies to ensure that their participation is safe, sensitive and meaningful. Spaces and partnerships with children and young people need to be developed to help them take action to cope with the crisis and contribute to reducing the spread of COVID-19.

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE MUST BE PROTECTED FROM VIOLENCE

*Make, or ensure functioning of, all child-related helplines because currently children's helplines do not function well. [The government] may create or establish new helplines specifically for children and make functional the children's help desk in all police stations. (Ameet, 16, male, Bangladesh)*

*During this pandemic period, I want the government to better protect children with disabilities, like me, to not be discriminated against. (Charles, 16, male, Indonesia)*

*The government should provide lessons on safe networks [that can be] used by children. (Jannatul, 17, female, Bangladesh)  
If I were a decision maker, I would build playground for children to play that will be safe also. (Uganbayar, 15, male, Mongolia)*

- **Governments, donors, UN agencies and the international community must prioritise child protection actions in all national COVID-19 responses.** This includes ensuring continued functioning of child-friendly reporting mechanisms, such as SOS hotlines, to enable child-friendly counselling and guaranteeing children and young people know where and how to contact these services.
- **Governments, UN agencies and civil societies must fund and implement a mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) strategy for reaching those directly and indirectly affected, especially the most vulnerable, taking into account gender, age and disability.** This support should address fear, stigma, negative coping strategies and other needs identified through assessments. It should build on positive, community-proposed coping strategies that promote close collaboration between communities and are inclusive of faith actors and health, education and social welfare services.
- **Government, UN agencies, civil society, faith-based organisations and the private sector should work together to make the Internet a safer place for children and young people.** This includes strict implementation of laws on cybercrime, such as the online sexual exploitation of children and online bullying, and intensifying efforts to raise online safety awareness amongst children and young people.

## SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION

*I want to let the government know that it is quite difficult for us to take an online class; we cannot ask questions and sometimes the teachers go too fast. I would like our PM [prime minister] to support [us with] educational materials and cell phones. I want them to actually visit the area. I also want to let them know that the indigenous people have no Internet access, and [the government] should provide them one. (Jirawong, 15, male, Thailand)*

*It is urgent that the prime minister makes provisions for resuming schools in a timely manner which would be productive to children's education and well-being. (Asim, 17, male, Nepal)*

*We also demand to create a fund for the poor youths so that they may not drop out. They may indulge with bad work. Many female youths may be victim to child marriage. (Naimul, 15, male, Bangladesh)*

*I and many of my friends go to private school. Usually our parents save money to pay our school fees, [but] by now it's almost been four months since our parents have gone [without] work [and] they are left without savings. So, it's difficult for all of us to pay the school fees. The government should support the children to continue their studies; if not, some children may discontinue their studies and go for work. (Dharshika, 11, female, India)*

- **Governments, donors, UN agencies and the international community must improve access to and availability of age-appropriate and gender-responsive distance education methods** to mitigate the disruption COVID-19 school closures are having on learning. This means urgently rolling out child-friendly, age-appropriate methods, such as TV, radio and/or online learning.
- **Governments must ensure that education reaches the most vulnerable children,** particularly where learning has already been difficult or interrupted due to fragility or exclusion. This includes considering children and young people with limited access to the Internet or technology and the challenge of households with several children of different ages.

- **Curriculum developed for distance learning should include life skills education** that can help children and young people to recognise and mitigate violence, exclusion, stigmatisation and poverty-associated risks. This is crucial to preventing increased rates of child labour and child marriage.

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WANT SUPPORT FOR THEIR FAMILIES AND THEIR COUNTRIES' MOST VULNERABLE FAMILIES TO EARN AN INCOME AND PROVIDE FOR THEIR CHILDREN.

*When the government supported [people with] masks, rice and oil, some poor households, including our house, who really are in need, didn't receive it [because] it was done by drawing lots. Next time they do it, they should collect a list of poor households and distribute those items. (Tun, 15, male, Myanmar)*

*Provide livelihood support or additional capital for my parents and for other parents in our community to support their children's needs. (Respondent, 12, female, the Philippines)*

*Children have gone into a depression during this crisis because of the economic impact on the families; hence, the government should reach out to children through support. (Sheetal, 15, female, India)*

- Governments, donors, UN agencies and the international community must urgently take action to scale their responses to address acute hunger. **This includes investments in public health and water, sanitation and hygiene to address root causes of child malnutrition.** They must ensure that critical food assistance and nutrition programmes (e.g. community management of acute malnutrition) are adapted safely and functioning throughout the COVID-19 response.
- **Governments should ensure social protection measures are in place for the most vulnerable throughout the response and recovery phases,** providing families with cash or food assistance to meet their children's immediate basic needs and supporting parents to identify positive coping mechanisms for themselves and their children. Policies and services must be inclusive, especially for women, indigenous groups, minorities and migrants.
- **Governments, banks and microfinance institutions should develop and fund poverty alleviation plans that incorporate economic recovery lending to help the most vulnerable families recover more quickly after the shock.** These institutions can provide temporary grants to smallholder farmers and businesses to restart production and income generation. Banks can waive fees on loans and extend payment deadlines.



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# INTERNATIONAL OFFICES

## Executive Office

Waterview House  
1 Roundwood Avenue  
Stockley Park  
Uxbridge  
Middlesex UB11 1FG  
UK  
+44.207.758.2900

## New York and United Nations Liaison Office

2nd Floor  
919 2nd Avenue New York  
NY 10017  
USA  
+1.212.355.1779

## WVI Geneva and United Nations Liaison Office

Geneva Nations 6th floor  
Rue du Pré-de-la-Bichette 1  
1202 Geneva, Switzerland  
+41 22 592 1500

## WV Brussels & EU Representation

18, Square de Meeûs  
1<sup>st</sup> floor, Box 2  
B-1050 Brussels  
Belgium  
+32.2.230.1621

## Asia Pacific Regional Office

**Singapore**  
750C Chai Chee Road,  
#02-14, Viva Business Park,  
Singapore 469003

### **Bangkok**

7th Floor 809, Soi Suphanimit,  
Pracha Uthit Road Samsen Nok,  
Huai Khwang, Bangkok 10310, Thailand