world relief®

PANDEMIC & POVERTY:

COVID-19

IMPACT ON THE WORLD'S POOR

A Letter From Myal Greene, President & CEO of World Relief

In the early part of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic first began, there was no shortage of pundits, politicians, and scientists predicting how it would change our lives. It seemed that everyone was making their own predictions about how long it would last and what its enduring legacy on the "new normal" would be. Two years later, everyone in the world has seen their lives affected and changed in one way or another. Because this pandemic has affected each of us in personal ways, many of us may not have fully understood how it has affected the economic, social, physical, and mental health of the collective global community.

COVID-19 has hit the world's most vulnerable time and time again with a ferocity many of us have not seen in our lifetimes. This pandemic has indeed grown into one of the greatest humanitarian issues in recorded history.

As we will lay out in this report, those in poverty have been dramatically affected. COVID-19 has had a devastating long-term effect in every area of life — economic, social, emotional, and physical.

We may be tempted to read the following pages with concern and worry. But that is not enough. We must allow what we learn to form us into a more compassionate people who come alongside the vulnerable to even greater degrees.

When World Relief was founded more than 75 years ago, it was done so on the heels of World War II and in response to what at the time was the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Today, we have a similar call.

Tragically, those in poverty typically bear the brunt of the injustice in our world. This is only multiplied during a global crisis like the one we have experienced for the past two years. Pockets of the United States have experienced tremendous pain and setbacks because of COVID-19. As we have seen in both the United States and abroad, those living in vulnerability have suffered significantly from the social and economic consequences of the pandemic.

As this report will show, the impact of COVID-19 on the world's poor is massive: A World Bank prediction from June 2021 was that this pandemic is expected to increase global numbers of extremely poor people by 97 million. And this past December 2021, UNICEF warned that COVID-19 "is rolling back virtually every measure of progress for children."

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As global citizens, and especially as Christ-followers, we have a vested interest in helping those in poverty to survive and thrive now and long after this pandemic has run its course: We help because of our common belief that all people are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). And because of this truth, our care for those in poverty matters: "...whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

Our end goal with this report is not simply education. It's a push toward compassionate, thoughtful action that recognizes we are part of a global community. We are more than just citizens of one country — we are citizens of the world, and right now, our world needs open hands and open hearts. Lest we develop a savior complex, we must remember that at some point, we are all recipients of others' kindness, and we should desire that our global friends thrive as well.

At World Relief, we pursue this type of action because we believe that Jesus has set an example for us. He showed us that we must seek to understand with empathy the suffering of our neighbors, and work together to bring about lasting change. We believe He is calling us and our brothers and sisters around the world — His Church — to take on the effects of COVID-19 with a focus on redemption, restoration, and reconciliation that comes only through Him.

Our prayer is that the sobering realities outlined in this report would spur us on toward compassionate, thoughtful action that addresses the ongoing effects of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable around the world.

Myal Greene
President/CEO, World Relief

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A GLOBAL OVERVIEW OF COVID-19 & POVERTY

In June of 1998, the heads of the U.N. agencies signed a statement defining the term "poverty," which read, "Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity." A fuller explanation included: "Poverty entails more than the lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision making."

Efforts at poverty reduction have existed for as long as humanity has. And in recent years — from 1990 until 2015 — we were seeing a general downward trend of global poverty rates around the world. This equated to a reduction of approximately one percentage point annually. In the years following, poverty continued to trend downward, but at a slower pace.

And then 2020 came, and with it, COVID-19, arguably the largest humanitarian crisis any of us have experienced in our lifetimes. With well over 400 million cases of COVID-19 and its variants to date and an additional 5 million+ related deaths, there is nowhere in our world that hasn't been touched by the virus.

And yet, although COVID-19 has had far-reaching effects across the globe, in countries where a significant portion of the population lives in poverty, the impact is far deeper and will be longer-lasting. As a result of COVID-19, 97 million more people are estimated to now be living on less than $1.90 a day, with more than half residing in Sub-Saharan Africa.

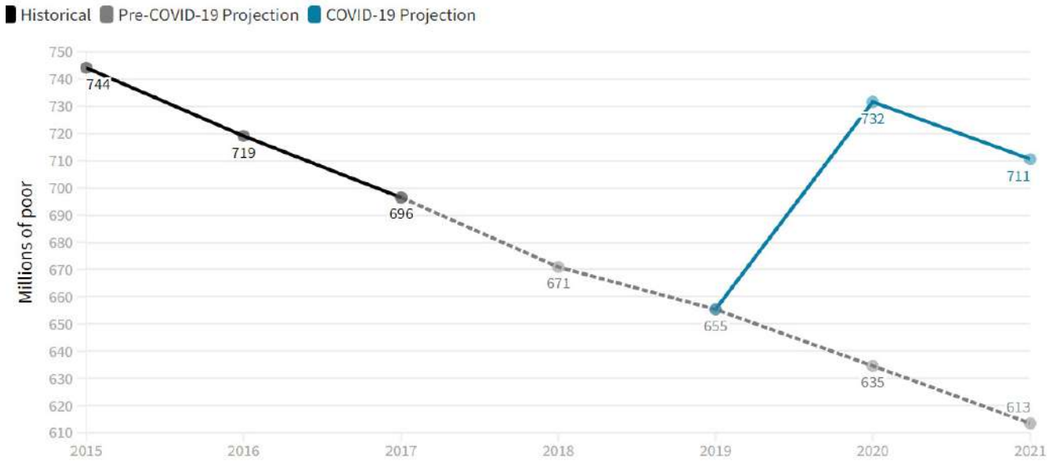
Globally, "three to four years of progress toward ending extreme poverty are estimated to have been lost." The reason for the increase in poverty is varied and complex: closure of international borders that affected tourism and other travel business; massive global demand declines including for exports; supply disruptions; dramatic scaling down of human and industrial activities during lockdowns; and now, inflation.

In pockets all over the world, COVID-19 has exacerbated already dire situations where food scarcity, conflict, inequality, and inadequate access to basic resources of education and healthcare were already prevalent. In countries like Haiti, for example, COVID-19 has been an added layer of crisis for a people already reeling from years of natural disasters and political insecurity. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, recurring outbreaks of Ebola and the instability of war and political upheaval have created complex challenges when combined with the impact of COVID-19. In northwest Kenya, those already reeling from the economic impacts of COVID-19 now have the additional loss of livelihood due to recent drought. This has created a real risk of starvation, both for humans and livestock.

The world's poorest are familiar with crises, but they can only take so much. Layer upon layer of crisis has led many of the most vulnerable to either be unable or unwilling to properly address the effects of COVID-19. Already overwhelmed systems don't have the capacity to address COVID-19, and vulnerable households have low resilience to withstand the kinds of shocks that this pandemic has induced.

Millions of people are seeking to find a way out from under the pile of COVID-19. We can help, but only through thoughtful, compassionate action.

Global Extreme Poverty Rate



Source: World Bank Data, June 2021

FOOD INSECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS

COVID-19 has affected nearly every area of life for the world's most vulnerable. This begins with how it has severely limited access to basic needs such as food, water, and shelter. For example, in many cases, supply chain demands have halted and delayed the delivery of critical items such as food and health supplies.

Expectations from the beginning of the pandemic showed that the number of people in low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs) globally who are facing acute food insecurity would nearly double to 265 million by the end of 2020.

But forecasting in the first half of 2022 predicts that acute food insecurity is likely to deteriorate even further in 20 countries of West Africa alone. Additionally, places like Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Yemen have populations identified or projected to experience starvation and death because of food scarcity. And since the start of COVID-19, extreme poverty has risen by nearly 3 percent in West Africa alone, with more than 25 million people unable to meet their basic food needs. This is a 35 percent increase compared to 2020.

In order to eat, people have been forced to sell their assets and compromise their livelihoods.

And young children globally are bearing the brunt of the devastation. Fifty million children suffer from wasting (low weight-for-height), the most life-threatening form of malnutrition. This number is expected to increase by 9 million due to the pandemic's impact on children's diets, nutrition services, and feeding practices. Steep declines in household incomes, changes in the availability and affordability of nutritious foods, and interruptions to health, nutrition, and social protection services have all played a role in this crisis in children's health globally.

There is virtually no aspect of livelihood and employment that COVID-19 has not interfered with. Many people have not been — and are still unable to — work in their usual jobs, so they lack the money needed to buy food and other household necessities. In Kenya, Nigeria, and Ethiopia alone, almost 1 in 3 household enterprises closed at the outset of the pandemic. In Gabon, South Sudan, Malawi, Uganda, Mali, Madagascar, and Zambia, revenue declined for more than 70 percent of household businesses. Agricultural income also fell due to declines in farm prices, the closure of weekly markets, and restricted transportation.

Individuals and businesses have been impacted on smaller, micro scales. But on a macro scale, entire economies have been hit hard; for instance, the Philippines economy contracted almost 10 percent as a result of dried-up jobs and reduced domestic demand. Additionally, as supply chain issues emerged over the past year, those in poverty have found it harder to access funds and purchase needed resources to get their livelihoods up and running again.

"When quarantined, people can't go out to farm or go to the markets to get food. In places like Rwanda, faith leaders are key to identifying vulnerable people and distributing food and supplies to them."

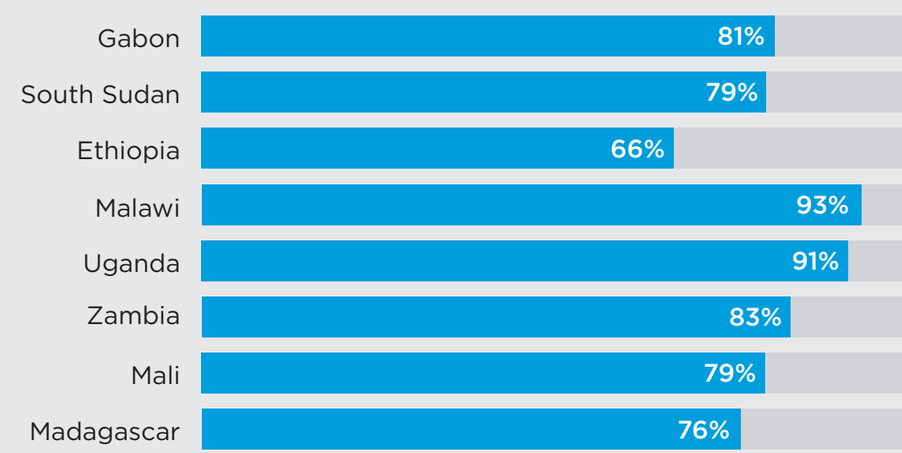
COVID-19 & Areas of Conflict

The direct link between poverty and areas of conflict is well documented. In fact, civil wars may result in an increase of 30 percent more people living in poverty, with many of these conflicts caused by weak economic growth and the volatility of low incomes. Conflict leads to numerous consequences: an increase in trafficking, refugees, and infant mortality, and a decrease in health infrastructure and delivery of critical aid supplies, for instance.

And for refugees fleeing these contexts — like some Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Iraq, and those who have returned to regions previously decimated by ISIS, including Sinjar, the Nineveh Plains, and Mosul — resources are scarce. When COVID-19 came to Sinjar, for example, there were only two hospitals and a single ventilator for nearly 160,000 people. Overwhelmed by the acute trauma of mass atrocities and genocide, other services to IDPs have been suspended due to COVID-19.

Income Losses in COVID-19 Times

Experienced decrease in income from non-farm family business
(%HHs with non-farm business income as a source of livelihood in the last 12 months)



Surveys conducted in May and June 2021

Source: World Bank

HEALTHCARE

COVID-19 has disrupted all parts of the healthcare system worldwide — both accessing good healthcare and offering it. Evidence shows that this pandemic is set to halt two decades of progress toward universal health coverage. Even before the pandemic, more than half a billion people were pushed — or pushed further — into extreme poverty due to rising healthcare costs. With the disruption of health services and strained health systems because of COVID-19, immunization coverage dropped for the first time in ten years. Additionally, deaths from tuberculosis (TB) and malaria have increased.

Throughout Africa, the pandemic has disrupted critical health services and undermined years of progress fighting other deadly diseases, including HIV, TB, and malaria. The reasons for not receiving adequate healthcare are many, including the fear of contracting COVID-19 while leaving home and the inability to reach facilities due to disruptions in public transportation and stay-at-home orders.

And when it comes to actually getting the COVID-19 vaccine, distribution, education, and availability have been a problem. The latest data shows that poorer nations rejected more than 100 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines in one month alone because of insufficient storage facilities, vaccine hesitancy, and overburdened healthcare systems. As supplies of vaccines grow, it seems the difficulties of vaccinating the world's poorest do as well.

Misinformation about the vaccine, low case numbers, and limited access to facilities and resources have left some in areas skeptical of the COVID-19 vaccine, even though the global commitment to equal access and education is growing.

But there are other reasons people aren't accessing treatment for both COVID-19 and other illnesses: general mistrust of healthcare workers/healthcare, fear of getting sick in crowded health centers, various lockdowns, and lower household income kept people from seeking care, to name just a few.

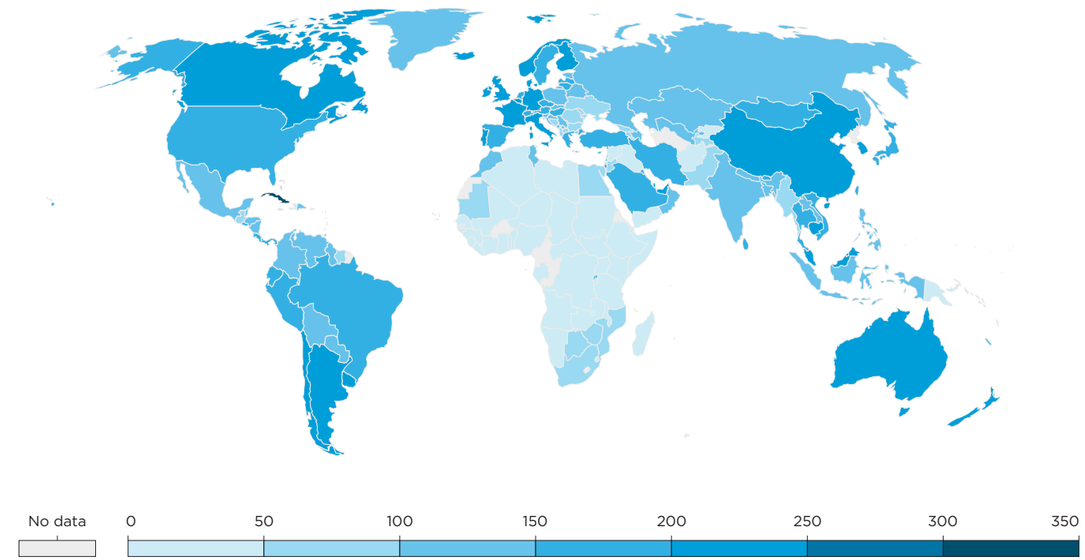
Additionally, there is great need for increased and robust health education surrounding COVID-19 and the vaccine, and also for men and women in local communities to become advocates for vaccination in order to see a grassroots movement that will embrace the protection provided by the COVID-19 shots.

Many local governments, however, remain committed to continued availability and distribution even as they face obstacles like these.

Pastor Fyson Kalilangwe is a pastor in Malawi. He is one of the 7,515 faith leaders World Relief has trained on COVID-19 infection prevention and control and promotion of the COVID-19 vaccine. After receiving training on the importance of keeping up with COVID-19 prevention measures and on the value and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine, Pastor Kalilangwe decided to get the vaccine. He has since been encouraging his church and community members to do the same. He has preached sermons on the importance of COVID-19 prevention and the benefits of being vaccinated. He is also working to sensitize and build the capacity of other faith leaders to respond to the pandemic and promote the COVID-19 vaccine and prevention measures among their congregations.

COVID-19 Vaccine Doses Administered (per 100 people)

All doses, including boosters, are counted individually. As the same person may receive more than one dose, the number of doses per 100 people can be higher than 100.



Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data – Last updated 21 February 2022

WOMEN & CHILDREN

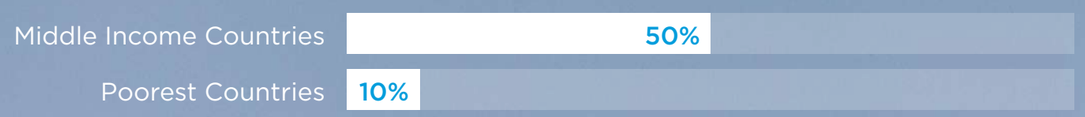
The devastating impact of COVID-19 on women and children cannot be overstated. One article states, "The impacts of crises are never gender-neutral, and COVID-19 is no exception." Women typically earn less, have less access to social protections, and make up most single-parent households. COVID-19 has decimated all of these areas — livelihood, access to good healthcare and education, and community support in parenting.

And children are no better off. In fact, UNICEF recently noted that in its 75-year history, this pandemic is the biggest crisis for children. A best-case, all-in approach will still only result in a 7- to 8-year recovery that will get us back to pre-pandemic levels of health and equity. Additionally, The Lancet Report showed that the estimated number of children affected by COVID-19-associated orphanhood and caregiver death has increased by 90 percent from April 30 to October 31, 2021, up from roughly 2.7 million children to 5.2 million.

Along with rising rates of poverty come other major concerns, one of which is often referred to as the "shadow pandemic"— violence against women. With the lockdown procedures of COVID-19, domestic violence helplines and shelters have reported a spike in calls for help. Pre-pandemic livelihood and freedom of movement may have kept violence at home in check to a greater degree (though it still existed), but the results of economic tension and poor mental health during this pandemic have led to devastating consequences for women and children who live in constant close contact with violent partners and caregivers.

Even before COVID-19, 1 in 3 women worldwide experienced physical or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner. Emerging reports have shown that violence against women and girls, especially domestic violence, has intensified since the pandemic began. Additionally, child marriages are increasing after years of decline, with a projected 10 million additional girls at risk due to COVID-19. The reasons for this are many and include the fact that families need the extra money; having one less child in the house is one less person to feed, and closures of schools that make learning inaccessible.

Global Student Internet Access

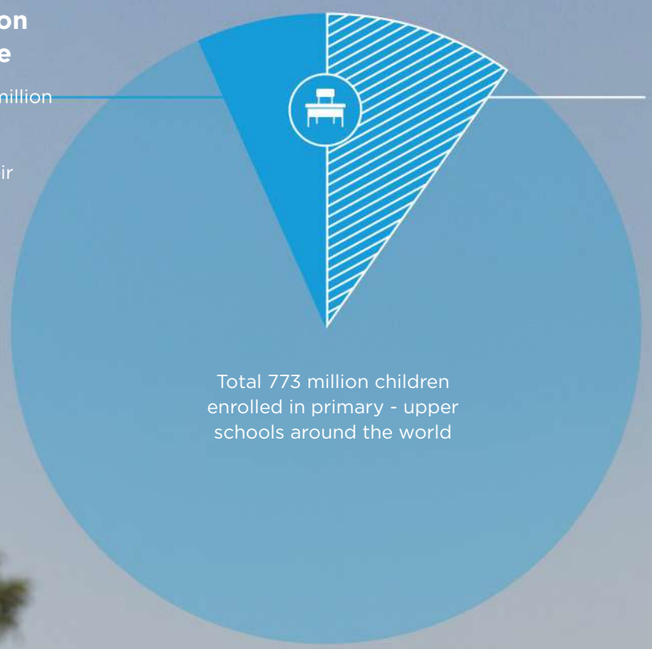


Source: World Bank

Missing In-person Instruction Time

Globally, around 131 million schoolchildren have **missed three-quarters** of their in-person learning from March 2020 to September 2021.

Source: UNESCO



Among them, 59%—or nearly 77 million—have **missed almost all** in-person instruction time.

Source: UNESCO

The impacts of COVID-19 on women and children do not end there. They extend to job loss: Women globally have disproportionately suffered the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 as a result of job losses, reduced hours, increased pressures of care and domestic work, and strains on both physical and mental health. Mothers globally were nearly three times as likely as fathers to report taking on the majority or all of additional unpaid care work related to school or childcare facility closures. Additionally, mothers of children under age 12 were most likely to move from employed to not employed status.

Finally, 29 percent of women living with children lost their jobs compared to 20 percent of men living with children. Women and girls are also far less likely to receive relief from governments or NGOs.

In the area of physical and mental health, they also fare no better: Women are more likely to report strained mental health, with younger women most affected — 71 percent of women aged 18–24 compared to 59 percent of young men.

Moving to the area of education, globally, schoolchildren have lost over 1.8 trillion hours of in-person learning due to COVID-19 lockdowns. But in places like India, where education is vital to escaping generational poverty, the closing of schools has been devastating, leading to what some call a "lost generation" who will be unable to escape the cycle of poverty. In places like these, those in poverty cannot afford a smartphone or internet — and therefore have no access to remote learning. Only 1 in 10 students in the poorest countries has internet access. COVID-19 has taken away education, but it has done something more: It has constrained incomes, leading many children to have to work to help provide for their families.

In late 2020, the World Bank estimated that a 7-month absence from schools would increase the share of students in learning poverty (the percentage of 10-year-old children who cannot read and understand a simple story) from 53 percent to 63 percent — and that an additional 7 million students would drop out of school.

The unbalanced devastation women and children are facing as a result of COVID-19 calls for a concerted, compassionate response at all levels — individual, local, state, and federal.

The Strengthening Community Outcomes through Positive Engagement (SCOPE) COVID-19 Project in Malawi trained 217 women in making cloth face masks. In total, they made 12,489 cloth face masks, some of which were donated to early childhood centers and antenatal clinics. Others were sold at a small fee to generate income for the women. The trained mothers expressed joy in learning the new skills. One of the mothers said, "If you want to help someone who is hungry, you help them by teaching them how to fish, so that whenever they want fish, they will go to the river and fish for themselves. By teaching us these skills, World Relief is helping us to continue fishing for ourselves."

WHAT WORLD RELIEF IS DOING, AND WHAT THE CHURCH CAN DO TO HELP

The U.S. State Department recently highlighted at least three roles that faith-based organizations have played throughout the pandemic: helping to overcome vaccine hesitancy and building vaccine confidence; serving as safe venues for educating the public and administering COVID-19 testing and vaccination; and upholding human rights and religious freedom for all.

While churches have rallied to support the most vulnerable impacted by COVID-19, they have also been affected by misinformation around the world. This misinformation, based on rumors, misinterpretation of scripture, and community fears, has prevented communities from receiving the preventative tools they need to slow the spread of COVID-19, including vaccinations.

Through the pandemic, World Relief has worked with national and local faith leaders to ensure that they have the knowledge and tools to regularly engage people in their congregations and communities to dispel myths and combat rumors regarding the COVID-19 vaccine as well as share important prevention information. In Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, World Relief's USAID-funded SCOPE project has developed story-based curriculum to train Christian and Muslim faith leaders and communities and equip them with language to engage faith communities in dialogues promoting the vaccination. In Kenya and Rwanda, these tools have been adopted by the ministries of health and other partners.

At World Relief, we have been integrally involved in providing a thoughtful, compassionate response since the early days of this pandemic. We launched a learning platform called "COVID and the Issues" on how COVID-19 is affecting gender-based violence, food insecurity, health, child protection, and economic development, among other issues. Additionally, World Relief built an online learning community called The Workshop that is designed to offer a collective space for individuals and teams to connect, learn, and grow in order to better serve people in vulnerable situations in their communities. World Relief is also on the ground providing community mobilization through education and awareness about COVID-19, economic planning, healthcare resources, and compassionate care for children in countries throughout Africa and the rest of the world.

Through World Relief's Families for Life program, we continued to help couples deepen their understanding and appreciation for each other, thus reducing the occurrence of violence in home settings. In eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, a high rate of violence meant World Relief staff had to create and facilitate support groups and serve as mediators toward more healthy home lives. And through Care Groups and Outreach Groups, World Relief staff have been able to engage thousands of community volunteers to share life-saving health messages through mothers' groups and household visits.

TAKE ACTION

We need a consistent, thoughtful, compassionate response to reverse the devastating effects of COVID-19 on those in poverty. Through the influence and care of both churches and the U.S. government, we can provide just that so that those most impacted by COVID-19 and poverty globally can build a future filled with promise and hope.

For Churches

We encourage you to pray:

- In general for the safety and health of the world's most vulnerable. Pray that the barriers that keep people in poverty would be overcome and that each person would be given the opportunity to flourish in their communities.
- Specifically for women and children. Pray that each woman and child would have the opportunity to dwell in safety, access necessary education and resources, and have hope in the current crisis.
- For the education, access, and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. Pray for World Relief and others who are trying to get good public health information and the vaccine to every person who needs it.

We encourage you to take action:

- Partner financially and in other ways with organizations like World Relief that are on the ground seeking to provide care for the world's most vulnerable.
- Reach out to the communities in your area most affected by poverty and COVID-19 and offer resources and friendships.
- Build an ethos of compassion in your congregations and communities that prioritizes those in poverty and that takes the pain caused by COVID-19 seriously.

For Governments

We encourage the U.S. government, and for you to advocate with your elected officials:

- To consistently pursue vaccine education and equity, including consistent and robust donations to COVAX, the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access program, and support for recipient countries' planning and implementation of vaccination campaigns.
- To leverage diplomatic pressure to urge all countries to provide safe, easy access to vaccine distribution.
- To expand global and domestic vaccine production capacity and capabilities, including through new technology and expanding manufacturing capacity.
- To further develop humanitarian and educational programs that would help those most impacted by COVID-19, specifically women and children, and to create new programs that would support the rebuilding of jobs, livelihoods, and social service infrastructure, including education, child protection, and other social services, that have been lost.
- To partner with faith-based organizations and community leaders to promote public health information about the prevention of COVID-19 and vaccines.
- To support responses that prioritize the holistic care of millions of children who have lost a parent or caregiver due to COVID-19.

In collaboration with and support from the U.S. Government's American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), in the past six months, World Relief has participated in vaccination efforts in several countries by using a "Mobilize and Vaccinate" approach. Vaccine shortages and stockouts are still a problem in many of the hardest-to-reach communities around the world. Through the SCOPE COVID-19 Project, World Relief has worked with local health systems to coordinate vaccine availability in places where demand is created by dialogues and training. For example, in December 2021, World Relief coordinated mobile vaccination vans and door-to-door health visits in the Blantyre, Mangochi and Mzuzu districts of Malawi to provide over 45,000 vaccinations.

World Relief is a global Christian humanitarian organization that brings sustainable solutions to the world's greatest problems – disasters, extreme poverty, violence, oppression, and mass displacement. We partner with local churches and community leaders in the U.S. and abroad to bring hope, healing, and transformation to the most vulnerable. Founded in 1944 in response to a situation of mass displacement in Europe, World Relief has worked in more than 100 countries, including partnering with the U.S. State Department and with thousands of local churches to resettle approximately 300,000 refugees to the United States since 1979.

Learn more at www.worldrelief.org.

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