

Emergency socio-economic support in the Covid-19 pandemic in India and Bangladesh

The coronavirus pandemic is affecting more and more people around the globe and, besides the health emergency, significant issues are becoming apparent, particularly at the economic and social level. In an effort to prevent the virus to spread, **many countries declared preventive lockdown**, which is helping on one side to reduce the impact of Covid-19 on people's health and therefore on health systems, but on the other side is dramatically affecting millions of people, especially among the most vulnerable ones.

As a consequence of lockdown, in fact, the informal sector in which most poor workers operate has been particularly affected: many people depend on daily labor and lost their sources of petty earnings with which they used to feed their families, others lost their employment especially in the private sector, many small-scale industries closed down, and there was an increase in the prices of essential goods, which made it even more difficult for households to cope with this new dramatic situation. Most of them do not have savings nor, in many cases, the possibility to store commodities for the next day and are relying on loans from neighbors or pawn shops.



In India and Bangladesh, countries in which Mission Bambini Foundation has been working since 20 years in partnership with several local organizations, **the social and economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are huge** and risk to undermine decades of successes in local development and particularly having regard to the most vulnerable people in the community, namely poor women and girls. In 2018, according to the latest statistics by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in the world, 129.2 million girls were out of school. In Southern Asia, in particular, girls are disadvantaged for almost all levels of education. The coronavirus pandemic is likely to have a huge impact on them, with an increased risk of sexual exploitation, early pregnancy and forced marriage. The economic hardships caused by the crisis will likely induce some families to invest less in girls' education beside increasing their domestic and caring responsibilities.

Lockdown has been declared at least till April 25th in Bangladesh and May 3rd in India. These next 2 weeks are crucial to avoid a wide stage of community spreading. However, with reduced to no income **food still remains the biggest problem: most families are not able to have more than one meal a day, managing with tea and biscuits for the rest of the day, even for children.** National and local governments put in place measures to ensure that food is distributed to poor communities but not all of them are reached by the government's aid or with sufficient quantities of food. There is therefore also a growing risk of social unrest as hunger spreads. Even if lockdown was not extended, life will continue to be difficult for months for poor households as social distancing rules will impose to reduce activities.



Mission Bambini Foundation's project will intervene on two integrated aspects.

On the one hand, to prevent the virus spreading, the project will **raise awareness on good hygiene practices with any available safe means** (telephone, WhatsApp, individual or small groups meetings keeping social distancing) and distribute hygiene kits. On the other hand **it will support the most vulnerable households with food distributions** so that they are in better health and less susceptible to the virus. Furthermore, as they do not need to go and look for food they will be more motivated to stay at home, thus further decreasing the virus spreading. Moreover, this support with food and hygiene kits will ease the families' main constraints, reducing the risk that they put in place dangerous coping mechanisms such as drinking alcohol, violence, child labor, early marriages, etc.

Distributions will also enable a contact with vulnerable households during which social workers will be able to understand if there are any child protection issues or any mental stressors that make quarantine even more difficult.

The project will be implemented by local recognized not-for-profit organizations with which Mission Bambini's Foundations has been collaborating for 5-15 years and that have a significant experience in community development, awareness raising techniques and distributions of food and non-food items (for the time being, **ASSIST NGO** in Andhra Pradesh – India, **Sharana NGO** in Pondicherry - India, and **Dalit NGO** in Bangladesh). Food items will be chosen according to the local traditions and will include, among others, rice, lentils, oil, salt, sugar, masala, tamarind and potatoes. Hygiene kits will include soap and washing soap.

Teams in charge of distributions will be equipped with individual protection devices (hand sanitizers, masks, gloves and disinfectant) and will ensure social distancing rules are complied with at any time.



Therefore the long term impact of the project will be to reduce the lockdown effects on community in terms of social and economic issues in order to prevent the virus spreading but also to avoid child protection risks such as early pregnancies, child marriage or school dropout and, in larger terms, the outbreak of violence that may take place in case basic needs are not covered. In turn, this will help to maintain decades of achievements in development, particularly for the most vulnerable people, such as poor women and girls.

