



QSA NEWSLETTER

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Welcome to the QSA Newsletter where you will meet new people, learn about our projects and join us in helping to change lives. We encourage you to let us know your thoughts and get involved. In this newsletter, we look at the various ways QSA is helping project communities in the longer term COVID recovery.

Not just a health crisis: The impact of COVID-19 on women in developing countries



The UN estimates the pandemic will push 47 million more women and girls into poverty by next year¹

While COVID-19 is coming under control in some countries like Australia, it is still spreading rapidly or only starting to escalate in some parts of the world, and no country is immune. No longer just a health crisis the pandemic is quickly creating an unprecedented economic and social crisis, and will be most acute in less-developed countries where the long-term impacts are likely to last for decades.

Women, children and vulnerable people are likely to be the most severely affected. This is a major issue for governments and civil society organisations in developing countries. We look at the impact on women and what it means for QSA and its project planning.

¹ UN Women [Gender equality in the wake of COVID-19](#), September 2020

The economic and social impact of poverty is exacerbated by circumstances resulting from COVID-19 like border closures, returning migrants, closure of public services, schools, businesses, factories and markets. In developing countries where infrastructure is poor, and government social support is limited or difficult to access, job losses and cuts in family incomes are drastic for families that rely on daily-waged employment, casual and informal work. Many have no savings and are at risk of falling into poverty or dropping further below the poverty line.

COVID poses a real challenge to the UN Sustainable Development Goal of ending poverty by 2030 ... such an increase could represent a reversal of approximately 10 years in the world's progress in reducing poverty. In some regions, the adverse impacts could result in poverty levels similar to those recorded 30 years ago.²

COVID-19 has had an immediate impact on families in QSA project areas. With border closures, some families in Cambodia that relied on buying food and selling produce across the border in Vietnam were suddenly without an income and short of food. Some villagers in these areas have been able to create home gardens to grow vegetables and raise chickens or fish, but this is beyond many who do not have access to land and water and cannot afford tools, seedlings and other inputs required.



Emergency food supplies provided in rural communities in Tamil Nadu (Credit: Vasandham Society)

In the longer term, the impact of COVID is likely to drive many of these people further into poverty. They may be forced to take action such as selling land or other assets, entering further into debt, undertaking risky migration or unsafe work, and withdrawing their children early from school.

Women are at greatest risk

Already at greater risk of contracting the virus in their roles as carers (paid and unpaid, in the workforce and at home), and in high-risk health sector occupations, women are also disproportionately affected by the economic and social impacts of the pandemic.

² Sumner, A., Hoy, C. & Ortiz-Juarez, E. (2020) [Estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty](#). WIDER Working Paper 2020/43. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER.

Job losses in female-dominated industries have been huge - garment manufacturing, hospitality, domestic work - as such work is more likely to be informal, casual and less secure. Female-headed households are likely to be the most seriously impacted by the loss of income.

With poverty comes an increase in many associated risks for women and the children for whom they are primarily responsible, in areas including education, child safety, family violence, discrimination, exploitation, and nutrition. Those already vulnerable are at even greater risk, particularly those with a disability or from other marginalised groups.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, many women became isolated with greater caring responsibilities and with reduced access to support. Even as restrictions lift, women are reportedly at increased risk of violence, harassment, trafficking, early marriage and exploitation.

Social distancing policies and mandatory quarantines, which are required to contain the spread of the virus, increase the risk of exposure to intimate partner violence.³

What do we hear from QSA projects?

In Uganda, the fear and the lockdown, more than the virus itself, have increased family and income stress with isolation and job losses, exacerbating the incidence of domestic violence. While the majority of project participants at St Jude Family Projects in Uganda continue to reap produce from their gardens, food theft in the community is occurring where access to markets and supplies have dried up. For some, it is becoming a matter of survival. There have been some very sad reports about family situations.



Making soap for COVID-19 prevention in Uganda (Credit: St Jude Family Projects)

³ Peterman, Potts, O'Donnell, Thompson, Shah, Oertelt-Prigione, and van Gelder, 2020. [Pandemics and Violence Against Women and Children](#). CGD Working Paper 528. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

In India (Tamil Nadu), both QSA's partners initially reported an apparent drop in domestic violence, purportedly related to the closing of alcohol shops during the lockdown. However, after liquor shops reopened, reports of domestic violence complaints across the country have gone up considerably. In Theni District, the Vaigai Women's Federation started by our partner Vasandham Society continues to facilitate counselling and access to support through its expansive network of women throughout the community.

Rural communities in Cambodia, India and Uganda have been impacted by the return of many migrant workers, some of whom have been working abroad or interstate for many years. This has brought many economic and social complications. In many families, it has led to a drastic drop in income from remittances, social dislocation, increased alcohol consumption, and an increase in domestic violence.

While many migrant workers returned from neighbouring countries when borders closed, our partners in Cambodia report pressure is now building for family members to migrate again in search of work to source income. Often undocumented and dangerous for the workers, it also brings risks within the broader community. When parents migrate, children are often left with grandparents or sometimes even on their own. They are at greater risk of neglect, poor nutrition, dislocation and school absence. Whole communities can be "hollowed out" when large numbers of working-age people leave for long periods. Whether they migrate for work or remain behind, women and girls are at high risk from trafficking and other forms of exploitation.



Working with families in Cambodia to establish permaculture home gardens for food security (Credit: QSA)

Public schools in Cambodia closed in March, and are unlikely to reopen until the start of the next school year in November. With little or no access to the available online learning, many children in poor rural areas, particularly girls, are at risk of dropping out of school. Without adequate education and unable to pursue a decent career, these young people are highly exposed to repeating the cycle of poverty into which they were born. Those who are not enrolled in school or who drop out early are much more susceptible to exploitation, trafficking, and abuse. Our partner, Khmer Community Development, reports in families who have lost income, young people have been drawn to Phnom Penh to find work, and are unlikely to return when schools reopen.

What does this mean for QSA and its project planning?

When the COVID-19 crisis escalated in March, QSA partners were unable to complete activities due to travel and other pandemic restrictions - training courses and workshops were cancelled, offices and schools closed. The Department of Foreign Affairs' (DFAT) Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) allowed NGOs receiving funding, including QSA, to reallocate project funds towards COVID-related activities. All our partners were able to pivot some of their activities, moving swiftly to provide awareness-raising education, hygiene and emergency food supplies, often in remote communities with little or no access to government information or support.

Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia, where QSA currently works, are predicted to be especially hard-hit, either because of slowed progress in poverty reduction in recent years or because of existing high poverty levels.⁴ While there will be a focus on the immediate COVID-19 health issues, we mustn't lose sight of the underlying situation or ignore the longer-term economic and social impacts of the pandemic. More than ever, the communities supported by our project partners, will need to maintain, or build their resilience for the long road ahead.

QSA has also been providing support through refugee organisations who work with those in greatest need and can distribute what is required. QSA is providing financial support to refugees and asylum seekers in Australia who have lost their jobs in hospitality and agriculture due to COVID restrictions, leaving them with no income but still needing to pay rent and feed their families. In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, QSA's support for training in permaculture and food security has been crucial at this time. Refugees have access to home-grown vegetables and fruit and can earn some income by selling excess produce to their neighbours.



Food security has been crucial for many under COVID-19 lockdown, including in Cox's Bazar (Credit: BASD)

The authoritative Brookings Institution summarised the seriousness of the current situation in a recent paper:

To put this into context, 2020 will be the first time this century that the number of poor people will rise ... This comes after a spell of poverty reduction averaging almost 100 million people per year between 2008 and 2013.⁵

⁴ Sumner, A., Hoy, C. & Ortiz-Juarez, E. (2020) [Estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty](#). WIDER Working Paper 2020/43. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER.

⁵ Homi Kharas and Kristofer Hamel, [Turning Back the Clock: How will COVID-19 impact the world's poorest people](#), Brookings, 2 May 2020

QSA and its partners will continue to focus on our shared development priorities, including:

- Sustainable agriculture to provide food security and lift people out of poverty
- Engaging practical local solutions - build capability and resilience of those most affected
- Supporting those at most risk (health, economic and social)
- Increasing awareness of domestic violence and child harm and where to get support
- Empowering women as leaders and drivers of change
- Income security and opportunities including post-harvest management, seed saving, marketing practices etc
- Tackling climate change through adaptation and mitigation



QSA is supporting a campaign by Australian NGOs for continued assistance to vulnerable nations in light of COVID-19. With the hashtag, [#EndCOVIDforall](https://twitter.com/EndCOVIDforall), its tagline is

‘This doesn’t end for anyone until it ends for everyone’

QSA would like to thank its generous donors and DFAT’s Australian Aid program for their support that makes this work possible.



Permission was obtained for the taking and use of the photographs included in this newsletter.

If you would like to know more about QSA’s work, please contact Jackie Perkins in the QSA office on administration@qsa.org.au.

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NEWS QSA's Living Gifts brochure is underway, and will be available electronically by the end of this month. Look out for it in your in-box or contact the office if you would like to receive a copy by mail.

*Thank you
Fleur Bayley*



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