Unmasking the Impact of COVID-19 on Asia’s Most Vulnerable Children

We are facing a global health and economic crisis unlike any since the second world war — one that is killing people, spreading human suffering, and turning people’s lives upside down.

The COVID-19 Early Recovery Assessment includes a total of: 26,269 people from 335 communities across 9 countries in ASIA PACIFIC.

- 2,043 key stakeholders interviewed including parents/caregivers, children, community leaders, gov’t, women’s groups, faith leaders, local partners & CBOs.
- 14,166 households surveyed
- 1,983 families having members with disability
- 10,060 children surveyed

Loss of livelihood is the top-most concern for the rural and urban poor, followed by limited access to food.

Daily wage workers (59% of the sample), the largest segment in the survey, and the largest segment of many Asian economies, have been the hardest hit.

71% of that segment indicated that they have been fully (34%) or severely affected (37%).

I lost my husband two years ago. Before COVID-19, I worked as a maid in 3 houses. I lost my income after the pandemic as no one would allow me to work in their homes. I was helpless and resorted to begging from house to house. They told me to find other means of supporting my two children.” Laila, 45, Bangladesh
Highlights of the significant findings

61% of respondents’ livelihoods fully affected

32% of households are diminishing core assets

52% of households rely on less nutritious food

27% increased gap in access to basic hospital services (34% for urban respondents)

Highlights of the key recommendations

National Governments

1. Scale-up social protection interventions for nutritious food, cash, and voucher assistance that are child-sensitive, gender-responsive which provide a pathway to broader social protection.
2. Optimise the targeting of beneficiaries in government mental social assistance schemes.
3. Increase investment in public works programmes.
4. Address the immediate gap in healthcare access, including community health worker scale-up and skill building.
5. Support micro, small, and medium enterprises to achieve business continuity through flexible finance.

International Cooperation Agencies & Multi-lateral Partners

1. Invest in economic recovery programmes that build household resilience to climate change and disaster impacts.
2. Leverage faith-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, and civil society actors’ community engagement, footprint and reach to complement gov’t capacity and efforts.

Implementing Partners

1. Strengthen social accountability mechanisms to ensure feedback to policymakers on the impact of their COVID-19-related policy implementation at the local level.
2. Ensure Cash Voucher programme assistance is market-based and linked to longer-term financial inclusion and economic recovery activities.
3. Use this crisis to “build back better” to link short-term emergency measures such as cash assistance to medium-term recovery efforts that are “green” and linked closely into local and national markets.

Loss of livelihood is forcing parents and caregivers to take desperate measures that are negatively impacting children’s well-being.

24% of parents/caregivers resorted to physical punishment or emotional abuse in the last month (40% for urban parents)

26% of children confirmed that caregivers had used physical or psychological punishment in the last month

47% of parents/caregivers are partially able or completely unable to handle changes in their children’s behaviour

18% households reported experiencing severe stress, while 5% reported mental health illnesses

In Bangladesh, over 33% of children may be at risk of engaging in begging or other high-risk jobs

and almost 2% are likely to be married off early.