



Second Edition

Four more articles which could not be squeezed into the Summer magazine.

The Summer 2020 edition of Outreach Abroad could not publish in full every article provided by our partners. This pdf file provides you with the complete versions, however, to conserve space the photographs (with one exception) have not been included, so please see the magazine. Also, there is part two of an article by Linda that I could not get into the magazine.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the world and continues so to do.

The situations described in these articles will, at this time, be different to when the articles were written but everyone involved with every project still needs your prayers for facing the virus and for recovery in social, financial and spiritual terms.

Thank you, Nigel – Editor.

Enabling learning through the provision of school mid-day meals

By Cosma Opira, Programmes Manager, Oasis Uganda

Uganda

Schools Grow Food

It is believed that agriculture is the backbone of life for thousands of people living in Uganda. Oasis, in partnership with four primary schools in Pader district (northern Uganda), have, since 2018, been supporting schools to grow food. This food is prepared for the school children and served during their lunch break. The impact of the school feeding programme is enhanced through collaboration between teachers, local authorities, surrounding communities, and the pupils. It is heavily dependent on reliable weather.

School feeding improves child wellbeing including their education. With the Covid-19 and lockdown, parents have taken advantage of the situation to engage in agriculture with knowledge attained from "*Farming God's Way*". This provides an understanding that agriculture can improve learning amongst pupils in schools. Parents are confident that as schools resume, they will have enough to feed the children. Feeding the children is part of the integral development of the entire school.

Absenteeism has Dropped

With the involvement of the parents in food cultivation there has been a reduction in pupil absenteeism from school, and improved governance. Local authorities have become more responsive to the continued monitoring of schools to ensure that the welfare of learners is met.

The school meals not only provide nutritional benefit to the child, but also an overall welfare benefit. Before the program children would walk not less than 2 Km home to be provided with a meal to eat before they would return to school for afternoon lessons. This has since stopped because they are provided with a meal while at school.

The turning point

The teacher in-charge of agriculture at Paipir Primary School says, "because of the school feeding program, there is increased knowledge about the importance of education amongst parents. The entitlements and responsibilities of duty bearers like local authorities, school management committees and teachers has improved. Parents have been in position to walk their children to school and the children feel motivated to stay in schools where food is provided for lunch.

The meals provided at school alleviate hunger amongst learners, have increased their attention span in class and, in general, learners are becoming focused to achieve the best out of schooling".

Enabling learning through the provision of school mid-day meals (Continued)

By Cosma Opira, Programmes Manager, Oasis Uganda

Enabling factors

Parents have demonstrated the willingness to offer time and effort to clear land for crop cultivation.

School management committees have realised that vegetable growing is a source of income from which locally recruited support staff, who are not on government payrolls, could be paid. These include the cooks who prepare meals for the children.

Continuous support and education from “*Farming God’s Way*” training delivered by Paul Kyalimpa, enhanced the capacity of teachers and farm management committees to mobilise local communities and parents to realise *local solutions* to end hunger amongst school going children.

Regular monitoring by the Oasis Project staff in the district led to the bonding of school administrators and local communities due to the regular interactions put in place.

Community Enrichment Through Savings and Investments.
By Cosma Opira, Programme Manager, Oasis Mbale Hub, Uganda

Uganda

Local Household Welfare Affected

Oasis Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are implemented to enable lower communities to save and invest their financial resources into meaningful business ventures at individual and group levels. The current lockdown resulting from the global Covid-19 pandemic prevents people from congregating and has affected local household welfare within the communities. For the Self-Help Group members, they normally gather to collect money from individual shares and generate a pool of funds from which loans can be made. Money borrowed is invested into small business ventures, like running groceries and market stalls with profits used to support family livelihoods.

They feel the loans have enabled them to rise above the economic struggles and are in a position to self-support their livelihoods. They can buy and re-sell produce since this is the only operational business allowed to run in the local markets.

Self-Help Groups members applaud the project for having enhanced their confidence levels among local respondents in the community. Participants collaborate to find solutions to what could be done differently to alleviate them from poverty and support local leaders in the fight to reduce violence against children, youth and women.

The transformation

Before Nicole Nasio joined the Self-Help Group, she lacked confidence and had low esteem and couldn't interact with her peers in public. During the time she attended the 'all group dynamics trainings' delivered by the Oasis staff, Nicole gained confidence to face her fears.



When she saw her neighbours receiving agricultural input and technical assistance from Bukasakya Sub County (a local government office) intended for participants who were already running economic activities, she got encouraged and applied for a loan from the group and started her own business selling firewood and growing rice.

Using her accumulated savings of UGX 540,000 (about £116) which she earned at the end of the group cycle for year one, she was able to buy a plot of land. As a result, she says, *"I am so grateful for the trainings that I received from the Self-Help Group. Upon acquiring savings skills, my family is financially progressing positively, and we are able to provide for all welfare requirements for our children. In return I am empowering my female friends who are not in the Self-Help Groups by passing on the knowledge I attained"*

Community Enrichment Through Savings and Investments (Continued)

By Cosma Opira, Programme Manager, Oasis Mbale Hub, Uganda

Enabling factors

Government finds it effective to work with communities through organised Self-Help Groups and other forms of savings groups.

Self-Help Group existence in Bungokho County, (Mbale district), enables local communities to have capacity to address individual social household needs, economic wellbeing, and provision of basic education for vulnerable children.

Successful implementation of income generating activities from which members can continue to meet their livelihood needs.

Coronavirus Doubles Food Insecurity in Uganda and Beyond

By Pr. Paul Kyalimpa, SAFI Project Manager

Uganda

UN Warning

On 28 th April 2020 the United Nations warned Uganda and other East African countries about the devastating risks arising from the spread of Covid-19 across the world. The UN warned EastAfricans, (Kenya, Burundi, Ethiopia, Uganda, Somalia and Eritrea), of food insecurity during theCovid-19 pandemic.

The World Food Programme (WFP) estimated that around 20-25 million people across East Africa will not have a secure provision of food. These people face challenges of food shortage. Using SAFI's '22 Farming Elements' innovated by the staff, and supported by Operation Agri, farmers are being taught how to grow food for the East African people. Maize is widely grown and consumed in East Africa.

The support of Operation Agri in the UK is highly and truly appreciated at all times here in Kyenjojo district of western Uganda. Operation Agri has been supporting the Baptist Union of Uganda SAFI, (Sustainable Agricultural Farming Initiative), project in this part of Uganda long before COVID-19 started, and is still supporting us to enhance the development of Small Scale Farmers', (SSFs), farms to produce food, increase revenue per family unit, and protect the Environment, thus improving farmers' resilience to climate change as well.

Project Workshops Affected

The Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic has affected the SAFI project workshops as far as social distancing is concerned. That means we cannot carry on Farmer Field School training workshops as before with 12 Community Farmer Trainers (CFTs). We have, therefore, resorted to developing and using the 22 Farming Elements to reach individual Small-Scale Farmers, (SSFs), on their own farms, through farm visits to help them to develop their farms to produce food.

COVID-19 Affects SAFI Small Scale Farmers

In this time of social distancing SAFI (the Small Scale Farmers,) who are the beneficiaries of the project, are locked up on their farms but are busily engaged in food production. They are learning to use SAFI 22 innovated Farming Elements to assist them to develop their farms to grow and produce much needed food.

Even in the darkest time of Covid-19 pandemic SAFI Small Scale Farmers are active on their Farms, producing food that is badly needed by East African people.

Coronavirus Doubles Food Insecurity in Uganda and Beyond (Continued)

By Pr. Paul Kyalimpa, SAFI Project Manager

COVID-19 Affects SAFI Staffs Working Style

In spite of COVID-19 the SAFI staff has, during this epidemic, innovated these 22 Farming Elements to be used to monitor farm progress, and to be used with SAFI Small Scale Farmers (SSFs) to develop farms with innovation and creativity to produce food and increase revenue per family unit in the area. The staff use the 22 Farming Elements to reach the farmers through farm visits and have plans to use radio talks to teach more farmers in the area as well.

Here are the 22 Elements

Twenty-two Elements of a SAFI used for Farm development programmes are.

- 1) Participating families have a farm design, or map and a farm record.
- 2) Kitchen garden: includes vegetables etc., a non-tillage system.
- 3) A system for collecting rainwater, or some other method for saving water.
- 4) A walking space with perennial vegetables in mini-terraces.
- 5) Have vegetable tyres or gardens.
- 6) Produce Red worms to feed fish etc.
- 7) Farm made manures like Compost and use IPM methods.
- 8) Permanent source of animal manure.
- 9) Vegetable raised beds or mini-terraces.
- 10) Roots or other types of staple foods.
- 11) Fruit trees.
- 12) Medicinal plants.
- 13) Trash collection and elimination of plastics.
- 14) A good latrine.
- 15) Treated water.
- 16) Wood saving stove and/or bio-gas usage.
- 17) Improved farming technologies and good health on the farm.
- 18) Contour strip farming with animal traction (donkey / bull use).
- 19) Tree plantations.
- 20) Wildlife conservation area.
- 21) Livestock kept as an agribusiness system.
(Editor: Agribusiness is the business of agricultural production. The term is a portmanteau of agriculture and business and was coined in 1957 by John Davis and Ray Goldberg).
- 22) The beauty of a SAFI farm and farm enterprises are developed.

The Consequences of Covid-19 on the WALP Project

By Pr. Paul Kyalimpa, WALP Project Manager

Uganda

Covid-19 Prevents the WALP Class Congregation

Never could we at the Women's Adult Literacy Project (WALP) have imagined what the start of this year would bring to our nation and the world; surely, we are living in unprecedented times. With many businesses, projects, states and nonprofit making organisations experiencing different consequences due to COVID-19, I want to let you know what is happening at WALP project supported by Operation Agri here in Kyenjojo district of Western Uganda.

WALP Vision and Timeline Remain Unchanged!

We are still moving towards our Project Goal of reducing the impact of illiteracy among women in the community of Kyenjojo District throughout the years 2020 and 2021. Also, the Project Purpose is still to improve the women's capacity through learning how to read, write and do sums, and thereby to be better able to enhance the livelihood of their families and communities. With the amazing support of Operation Agri we believe we can get there. The women are in high need to learn new ways of livelihood.

WALP Staff Still working! Just Safely

After learning about the seriousness of COVID-19 we decided to submit to the guidance of our government authorities regarding social distancing. As a result, we have closed our church buildings to the general public meetings like teaching the WALP women, and switched to person to person study, so that WALP staff work by visiting homes of the WALP beneficiaries who are taught from their homes.

This is the planned way of how we intend to work within the time of the COVID-19 lockdown. Kyenjojo district had not got any Covid-19 victims until 14 May 2020 when a lorry driver from Rwanda landed here with Covid-19, and it is our prayer that COVID-19 does not increase here at all costs. Please keep praying for us, as we keep praying for you.

The Affected Beneficiaries are Still Moving On!

As you can imagine, COVID-19 has had a much greater effect on our beneficiaries, many of whom are dealing with stricter social distancing requirements with far fewer resources. The governments have forbidden all citizens to gather for worship, or even leave their homes to go to towns in cars or on motorcycles or to do income generating business. It is all stopped.

The Consequences of Covid-19 on the WALP Project (Continued)

By Pr. Paul Kyalimpa, WALP Project Manager

People with a personal motorcycle can only travel alone. People may walk short distances. WALP beneficiaries cannot congregate while being taught, they have to be two to four people at a distance of four feet from each other. Because of this WALP trainers have to move to the homes of the beneficiaries to deliver the training.

What does this mean to these beneficiaries?

They need your prayers and support now more than ever. Please pray that their training will continue to grow, that they and their families will be protected from the virus, and that their training will be completed in a timely manner.

My Visit to Pakistan – Light for the Nations (Part 1)

By Linda Nevin-Drummond

Pakistan

Mugal Forts and Cricket!

Pakistan and in particular Lahore, which I visited, is the land of Mughal forts, cricket, traffic, chicken biryani, and Islam. This shows in all aspects of life from Sufism which involves mysticism, to the visiting of shrines dedicated to Muslims in support of their strict blasphemy laws. Christians make up just 2% of the population of Pakistan, but Lahore, in the Punjab, has more Christians than other areas. They consider that Christianity came to Pakistan long before Islam! On the whole, Christians tend to be in the lower social economic bracket, have less education, and are employed in the least favoured jobs, such as working in the brick kilns. This applies even more to Christian women many of whom face harassment, (or worse), if they take work in Muslim homes.

Skills for Economic Independency

Learning skills to make them more economically independent is vital for the women. A Pakistani woman, Nargus Azhar, began literacy and sewing groups to help address this need.

I originally met Nargus over two years ago when I first visited Pakistan, and was so impressed with her projects that I helped her to link with Operation Agri when I returned home. I went back again in December 2019 to see how the projects were going.

Visits to Women's Sewing Groups

One project I visited is situated in a Christian village to the North of Lahore. The house we were in reminded me of a village from the Bible, with an open staircase to the roof. From there, we could see the various churches in the area; there were several denominations, including Baptist. As it was nearly Christmas churches in Pakistan stand out, as they have a lighted star mounted on their roofs. Another link to Christmas was in the portfolio of work that the students had completed; each had crocheted a Santa!

PART 2 OF LINDA'S REPORT ON HER VISIT TO THE LIGHT FOR THE NATIONS PROJECT IN PAKISTAN WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE JULY ISSUE OF OUTREACH ABROAD.

Editor's Note: If you are planning a trip to the area where Operation Agri supports a project and would like to write a piece for the magazine please let me know – nigeljones@operationagri.org.uk

My Visit to Pakistan – Light for the Nations (Part 2)

By Linda Nevin-Drummond

IN THE SPRING 2020 ISSUE OF OUTREACH ABROAD LINDA INTRODUCED HER VISIT REPORT BY MENTIONING THE NEED FOR WOMEN TO BE GIVEN LIFE SKILLS FOR ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCY. HERE, IN PART 2, LINDA DESCRIBES OTHER FORMS OF SUPPORT FOR THE WOMEN.

Spiritual and Emotional Support

As well as the hand crocheted Santas I saw on my visit to the Women's Sewing Groups, as I mentioned last time, I also saw beautifully crafted little dresses, shalwar kameezes, (the traditional tunic and trouser combination), and accessories. I love sewing myself and wish I had their skills of embroidery. These skills all need to be taught, otherwise they are easily lost as each generation moves on. The ladies gave testimonies of spiritual and emotional support from the group, as well as the dress making skills they have learned. Each lesson begins with a prayer and a Bible passage. The majority of the group are Christians, but they are open to all in the community and have a few Muslims in each group.

Literacy Lessons and the Future for Christian Women

The other important aspect of the work is literacy skills. The students were interviewed in my presence and I found out that about half of the women had never attended any school, and most of the others had only two or three years of education. They had all made progress in reading and writing Urdu. They now have more opportunities to take part in their communities economically, and to be able to help educate their own children.

The ladies explained how they had already put their skills into practice and told us how much money they had saved by being able to sew for their families. The next stage is to support them to be able to start some businesses, and I hope that will happen in the future.

Prayer Points for Christians in Pakistan

I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Pakistan visiting the projects and had answers to my prayers; my health was good, and we were all kept safe, as there were no suicide bombers in the area this time! The attacks in 2015 and 2016 had a terrible effect on the survivors. Christians, (and others), in Pakistan all need prayer to be able to deal with extremism. I am aware that there are some areas where Christians have security issues and experience fear, but that is not everywhere in the country, and none of that stops them. I was very impressed with the dedication Pakistani Christians have to love God and their neighbours in their land.

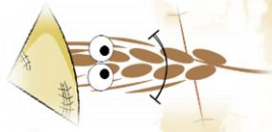
Children's Page - Giant Wordsearch!

By Janet, a friend of Operation Agri

Some of the words in the following paragraph appear in the Giant Wordsearch. Can you find all of them? Look across, down, diagonal and backwards! Operation Agri is a charity showing the love of Jesus by supporting overseas projects. The money provides things like books for children in school, seeds for sowing in the earth, rain harvesting tanks and health worker training. We have ten trustees. One trustee is the Chairman; one is the Treasurer, and another is the Editor. We publish a magazine, Outreach Abroad, and we produce posters, leaflets, videos, and PowerPoint shows for supporters and speakers using photographs from places in Africa, Asia and Central America. Can you find these areas in the pages of your atlas? You might have a bookmark from one of our appeals.



There are 33 words in the Giant Wordsearch. They will be printed in the October issue of Outreach Abroad. Did you find the hidden name of a long-term friend of Operation Agri who has featured on this page many times? **PS - It's OK to work with someone else on this.**



Youth

Kernel Corn here, this issue will be focused on our upcoming **60th anniversary** and how you can get involved!

60th Anniversary Challenge

As many of you may know, next year is the 60th anniversary of Operation Agri. This marks a huge milestone in the work that we do. We would like to set you a challenge in order to raise awareness of Operation Agri as well as some funds so we can continue in this vital work.

This challenge may be whatever you would like to do, whether it's a sponsored walk or maybe a sponsored silence (I'm sure your parents would love that one), whatever it may be, we would love to hear from you telling us what you're doing!

Email us at yp@operationagri.org.uk

Page

2020 has been a year of great change and uncertainty with so many unprecedented events happening in just the first four months! Turn to the project pages to see how the current situation is affecting other people. See how people are dealing with lockdown in other countries

Gap Year

I would like to mention again the gap year opportunities that OA are offering for 2021 and beyond. Believe it or not, Kernel Corn does not write the Youth Page! My name is Josh and this past year I've been on my own gap year at my local church. I would highly recommend it if you would like to deepen your faith. Your gap year could include a time in a country where we serve.

If you are interested or have any questions please feel free to email me.

Prayer Page

How can this not be about COVID-19?

Let's join our Partners in prayer, in their own words:

Prayers

For communities:

Pray for the health and safety of all the communities we support and the people of Uganda in general as we all grapple with COVID-19.

Pray that there will be enough people to care for crops. In many areas, crops are essential to avoid widespread famine.

For Partners:

Praying for the health and safety of the Oasis Uganda staff and their families.

Remember the staff at the two urban clinics in Managua (Nicaragua) as they attempt to deal with many impoverished families needing help and advice, asking God for protection for all involved.

Due to the pandemic all training ceased within SDKF, Uganda. For the project leader, Dennis Ssettaala, who has been very unwell.

Give thanks to God that his health has improved, and pray for protection for the trainers, and opportunity to resume training in the three areas of sewing, hairdressing, and motorcycle maintenance.

For authorities:

Praying for our leaders both in Uganda and across the globe, to make the right decisions during COVID-19 and the post pandemic recovery phase.

Pray that these actions will help to limit the spread of the virus.

For resources:

Praying for all our donors, funders, and supporters that they remain afloat during this crisis, and that all staff and donors who support Oasis Uganda are not significantly affected by COVID-19.

OA Harvest Appeal. Pray we can raise enough funds to maintain our work following the re-start.

For the future:

Praying for a global Christ-led recovery, where God's presence and will manifests over and above anything else in healing the world.

Praying for the recovery of Uganda post COVID-19 and especially the economic recovery as people's jobs and livelihoods are at stake.

Prayer Page (Continued)

How can this not be about COVID-19?

Let's join our Partners in prayer, in their own words:

For the future (Continued):

Pray for protection for the trainers, and for a swift return to opportunities to meet and resume training in the three areas of sewing, hairdressing and motorcycle maintenance.

With thanks to:

Oasis Uganda
AMOS, Nicaragua
SDKF, Uganda

Editor's Note:

This is just a selection of matters for your prayers please.

The magazine contains articles from almost all of the projects. Please pray for people and situations mentioned page by page.

The trustees need your prayer support as we join together for prayer ourselves and to make decisions to make that will, potentially, affect many people. We earnestly desire that we will know the Mind of Christ even more at this time of global uncertainty.

Thank you.

A Prayer Based Focus to Service
By Russell Ashley-Smith, OA Trustee and Chairman

Service

A Reversal of Emphasis

You won't be surprised to learn that the Trustees and Officers of Operation Agri regularly start and conclude their meetings with prayer and often pause during our time together to remember before our Lord a particular aspect of the ministry. Perhaps it will be our overseas partners or a finance matter. Even so, the majority of our time is taken up with the other items on the agenda.

One Trustee mused when we were together earlier in the year:

*"What would be the result if we reversed things in our meetings
and spent the majority of our time in prayer?"*

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck we took this challenge to heart, and started meeting on-line every month to spend 60-90 minutes in prayer.

It is Christ We're Serving

In everything we do as Christians you and I are called to serve our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. No less so in Operation Agri where we have the strap-line 'Christian Love in Action'. Do we manage to live up to these ideals? Living in a fallen world, sadly nothing we do can be perfect by our Lord's standards. It's only by God's grace that He still calls us to be His imperfect agents in the world.

In the current situation what is Operation Agri's distinctiveness?

- We keep in close touch with each of our partners, listening to them, and seeking to understand the situations in which they find themselves (which vary enormously). Individual OA Trustees, often with experience in the partners' regions, have responsibility to correspond with each partner.
- We commit ourselves to pray for each overseas partner and their ministry, and are actively doing so.
- We continue to forward funds such that the value is maintained in the partners' local currency, while OA absorbs any exchange rate losses with no detriment to the project.
- Our ministry and that of our partners is long-term – if God allows it, we will be there for them, and they will be available for the local people and communities they serve. Ours is not a box-ticking exercise; showing the love of Christ often falls outside such measurements.

A Prayer Based Focus to Service (Continued)
By Russell Ashley-Smith, OA Trustee and Chairman

- Because of the Christian commitment and prayer surrounding the ministry (both locally and from afar), we frequently see a 'loaves and fishes' factor – outputs are multiplied beyond our expectation.
- The ministry of Operation Agri is definitely blessed by our Lord, but we cannot 'go to town' expounding this for fear of endangering the work in some countries sensitive to Christian outreach.

The 2020/21 Appeal

In addition to remembering our overseas partners' concerns, we are praying for OA in the UK. Our new appeal resources were ready as usual in time for the Baptist Assembly – but that of course didn't take place, nor any of this year's expanded round of regional events, at which we were planning to encourage more churches and Christians to become involved with our ministry.

While we hope that our church buildings will have opened again by the autumn, we cannot be certain. Whether we'll be together in reality or virtually for our Harvest Festivals, we do hope that churches will continue to support Operation Agri at that time. Only if our income keeps to our budget, (prepared last autumn), will we be able to give our overseas partners the support they're expecting and will need, if they are to fulfil their programmes of work.

Please do your best to ensure your church and individual friends contribute to OA's finances this year.

Meantime we will continue praying – please join us (see the Prayer Page)!

We do thank you for your partnership in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Russell

PS - A New Option

As some computers do not have DVD players, we have set Up the option to download our Time for Trees! videos, PowerPoint files and other resources.

You can find the **Time for Trees Download Link** on the Appeal order pages of our website.

<https://www.operationagri.org.uk/current-appeal/>



COVID-19's Impact on OA Supported Projects

By Martin Butterworth, OA Trustee and Overseas Secretary

Overseas

A few Months Back

It's February and most of OA's grants for 2020 have been approved. Our 13 Partners are starting their activities for 16 projects in 10 countries. Our busiest few weeks are over! But this has been no ordinary year.

In a few weeks, the world as we knew it was turned upside down and shaken. By the end of March, we were in something called Lockdown and OA had proactively contacted its partners to clarify their response to a world pandemic, called COVID-19.

CMCY Bangladesh

A special parents / community meeting was arranged at the project office on March 12. In total 102 people were present in the meeting and CMCY personnel and DFDP teachers delivered important messages on COVID-19 prevention, and advised the participants to maintain WHO safety rules to remain safe and secure, maintaining social distancing from the deadly infection of COVID-19 .

Worldwide Response

Projects worldwide stopped as people obeyed instructions to stay at home. In Nepal, a lockdown that started in mid-March appeared to be working. Nepal is accustomed to outbreaks of flu virus that kills a few people, but this time it was different. A friend in Kathmandu recently emailed with amazement that the streets were totally deserted.

By the end of April virtually all of the activities associated with the projects supported by OA had stopped as governments imposed their versions of lockdown. OA issued a second Statement for its Partners and other stakeholders outlining in practical terms how OA will respond to COVID-19.

Trustees are having regular internet-based meetings to pray about, and discuss the implications of the pandemic on projects, partners, and beneficiaries. We will consider, and expect to approve, appropriate changes to project schedules and use of funds. However, our constitution prevents us supporting relief work and we don't have significant undesignated funding.

COVID-19's Impact on OA Supported Projects (Continued)

By Martin Butterworth, OA Trustee and Overseas Secretary

Mid-May

Now it's mid-May and we've been on lockdown for over a month, as have most of the countries where OA has partners. Reports from Africa and South Asia suggest there is a long way to go. Oasis Uganda tells us their country has 85 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and one death. They're on a complete lockdown with no vehicles allowed.

Bangladesh has 24 people with confirmed diagnosis and 3 people have died. In India there are 415 cases of which 23 have recovered and 7 died. India is a big country! This is far from over.

"The number is just increasing in Mumbai. Let's hope at some point it changes. Looks like the restrictions in the city may go on till end of June." (Sulekha Thapa, Oasis India).

Lockdown Taken Seriously

Many expected COVID-19 would create devastation in these countries with densely populated urban areas and a culture of extended families living closely together. It might still happen and I'm sure that's a big part of why lockdowns are taken seriously. They know what's at stake!

May 17th and OA partner Christian Ministry to Children and Youth, Bangladesh list their challenges:

- The COVID-19 pandemic crisis.
- The target beneficiaries are starving.
- Maintaining close communication with slum targeted families.

Safety First

Meanwhile, we're working with Partners and projects to minimise the impact, while emphasising at every opportunity that safety comes before project timetables. For most projects we anticipate postponed activities with staff working from homes. A typical example from Uganda:

"We have been in full lockdown with a curfew in place from 7pm to 6:30 am. Only essential service workers can operate. Schools remain closed, and public gatherings are banned."

"We remain in touch with our communities mostly through phone calls and text messages. Fortunately, farm activities are still ongoing and so some of the work around planting of crops is going on well. The Self-Help Group members also continue to save, but cannot gather in one area, so their leaders are going house to house, collecting individual member savings...."

COVID-19's Impact on OA Supported Projects (Continued)
By Martin Butterworth, OA Trustee and Overseas Secretary

Oasis Uganda (2nd May).

Although OA has diversified somewhat since the days of agriculture, (Operation Agriculture), farming still forms an important part of most of the projects we're involved with. It's essential that agricultural work can continue, those crops will be vital for our beneficiaries, many of whom are subsistence farmers.

" . . . we anticipate that we will be able to commence some field work from June onwards." But, "setting specific long-term plans is a challenge at the moment."
(Diordre Moraes LEADS, Sri Lanka)

Now in mid-May project teams are looking ahead. We're receiving proposals to continue paying salaries, while working out how to catch up on activities when travel and meetings are allowed. It might mean some hard decisions as we respond to requests for help.

CMCY in Bangladesh:

"As we are now living in the deep darkness, the black clouds covered us with its force, we are not seeing the light but we strongly believe today or tomorrow we shall be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel, and reopen the existing project, serving the most needy beneficiaries to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth again."

Thank You

Thank you for your support, your continued giving, and your fellowship with us in prayer, Martin.

***"it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil
his good purpose"***
(Philippians 2:13).

Operation Agri - Transforming Lives . . .
From the Treasurer, James Townsend

Treasurer

Testimony

Mendho Tamang in **Nepal** smiles as she shows appreciation for the training and help given by Operation Agri and its partner **Multipurpose Community Development Service (MCDS)**. "I thank **OA** and the **MCDS** team for providing training to grow vegetables. Before this the whole village had never learned how to do vegetable farming in a professional way, and produce good crops that could be sold at the market."

2018/19 was an encouraging year. Income of £235,054 enabled us to support fifteen projects in nine countries on three continents.

Operation Agri, (OA), continues to support projects that transform the lives of children, women, families, and communities, bringing new farming techniques, education, livelihoods, empowerment, healthcare, and social justice.

A Team Effort

We are grateful for the ongoing commitment of our donors both churches and individuals, who recognise the invaluable work that Operation Agri is engaged in, together with our 'in country partners' who bring their experience and expertise to provide the best of care, support and attention to those that need support and encouragement the most – **Transforming Their Lives**.

Income

Income for the year showed an increase of £9,430 from church and individual donations, albeit that partner donations were slightly lower during the year. The year's income included substantial legacies of £66,823 which enabled OA to increase grant giving to the various projects.

Our Annual Appeal for Malawi & Nepal ('Sowing Seeds for Success' and 'Learning for Life' respectively), raised £25,723 for Malawi and £21,613 for Nepal, an amazing total of £47,336, exceeding last year's appeal. *Thank you.*

Expenditure

Expenditure for the year as shown in the diagram, included £152,874 for Grants to our partners, (details in the graph below), salary, publicity costs and settlement of the Pension liability.

Salary and pension costs amounted to £18,125 reflecting just 10.8% against net of legacy income, which is achieved by OA having so many committed volunteers, most of whom are also Trustees.

Operation Agri - Transforming Lives . . . (Continued)
From the Treasurer, James Townsend

Another Testimony

Lubna in Pakistan said, "I was a student, but my parents had difficulty paying my college fees, so they asked me to stop studying. I wanted to study so I asked permission from them to join the sewing centre. Now I have a job in a boutique because of what I learnt from this centre, run by **Light for the Nations, (LFTN), supported by OA**. I am earning money to pay my college fees and support my family. I made new friends here and I came to know some good people. Thank you so much for making this possible."

Outlook?

The current year 2019/20 started with a promising outlook but has been affected, as with so many other charities and organisations, by the Coronavirus/COVID-19 outbreak. All our project partners have had to stop or modify most of their various project activities while everyone is in 'lockdown'. This has caused severe difficulties for so many vulnerable children, families and communities who rely on the support of Operation Agri and our partners who manage the projects that enable them to transform their lives.

This year we are simply unsure of how the forthcoming months will work out, and very much value your on-going support and prayers.

We continue to pray that the situation will settle down as quickly as possible so that we may, through our 'in-country' partners, be able to recommence the projects that are beneficial to so many.

Carol in Uganda says:

"Having left the Mbale district, I came to Kampala to find my mother, but she was unable to pay my school fees. With all hopes gone I sat at home for almost two years until I was told of an opportunity to take a vocational course at SDKF. After my studies in hair dressing at the SDKF Vocational training centre in Kampala, supported by OA, I set up a salon with a loan provided by SDKF and established my new business. Thank you so much to both SDKF and Operation Agri. With my salon I am able to save at least 10,000 UGX, (approx. £2.10), daily as well as contributing to my family for basic needs."

In these uncertain times, may we encourage you to further consider helping Operation Agri to resume these invaluable projects. We appreciate your prayers and financial support which really do ***make a difference and transform lives***.

Thank you again for your commitment to Operation Agri and the children, families, and communities that we serve. It is very much appreciated.

Every blessing, James D W Townsend, OA Trustee and Treasurer.

What's the Use of That?

By Jane and Ralph Hanger (Jane is an OA trustee)



Malawi



Answer!

In the past, much of this would have been discarded as useless, but under the Growing Greener project, supported by OA in Malawi, farmers are being shown how this can be turned into valuable compost. The compost enriches the soil, improving the quality and quantity of the crops and, at the same time, improves the water retention of the soil, thus contributing to conserving the environment.

Pastor Lloyd Chizenga and his associate Hanta who run the project in a number of places in Southern Malawi, received in depth training themselves, not only in the Sustainable Agriculture, but also in how to train others in it. One of the OA trustees was able to see this training taking place at first hand in September 2019 and was very impressed.

Hands-on training

In Mphemba, just outside Blantyre, some 60 farmers, men and women, gathered together for hands-on training. Chopping up the maize stalks, (which would probably just have been burnt to get rid of them), into reasonable sized mulch, took a lot of work and the men took it in turns to wield their machetes in this way. When enough mulch was ready everyone was gathered round an oblong area of ground which had been cleared and marked out by poles, for first instructions.

Gradually layers of maize mulch, then old soya roots, followed by green leaves and then a thinner layer of chicken manure were laid on top of one another to make up the pile. Before every handful was laid however, it was thoroughly soaked in water.

What's the Use of That? (Continued)

By Jane and Ralph Hanger (Jane is an OA trustee)

Everyone had their turn

At different times everyone had their go at applying the 'rubbish,' making it a very good, hands-on, co-operative exercise. By the end of the exercise, which took about three hours, the compost heap stood about five feet high in one half of the area prepared for it. This was now left for about seven weeks. Then it would be 'turned' over into the other half of the prepared area. Remember that this is the tropics and so the compost will have matured well by this time.

Probably one more 'turn over' of the heap and the compost will be usable within three months. This very practical demonstration of how to use some of the waste on the farm for such a good purpose, seemed to be well appreciated by the attendees who would now go back to their own farms and put it into practice, probably also influencing their neighbours to do the same.

Zero Tillage

Another aspect of conservation agriculture which was demonstrated on the same day, was the process of zero tillage. Instead of indiscriminate ploughing of soil before planting seeds, which can badly affect the water content of the soil, this method encourages just the making of holes at the point where the seeds are to be sown. Compost is put at the bottom of the hole before the seeds are sown which are then covered with soil and watered. This has been shown to be very beneficial, especially in very dry areas.

The pictures below show the ground being measured out for the holes and then the compost and seeds added.

Again, this seemed to be a new idea for many of the group who were used to ploughing their land and disturbing the soil structure each year.

Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 While Continuing to Provide Care in Rural Nicaragua

By: The Communications Team at AMOS Health and Hope

Nicaragua

Responding to the Pandemic in Rural Communities

2020 hasn't been easy for any of us. We know one way, or another the COVID-19 pandemic has affected you. You may be struggling, praying, feeling lonely or concerned for your safety or the safety of your loved ones. Yet, that hasn't stopped you from caring for others.

In Nicaragua, our community health workers continue to serve their neighbours amidst great adversity. However, we have hope because of the outburst of solidarity we have received from you in the last few months. Your prayers, support, and love for Nicaraguans motivate our team to keep giving our best every single day. No matter the distance or challenges ahead, we know we stand together in this.

Emergency Response

Since March, we have implemented an emergency response to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in 23 vulnerable rural communities, including:

- Training community health workers to share key prevention measures to help protect their communities from COVID-19, and by providing personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies.
- Delivering essential medications to community clinics so health promoters can continue to treat common illnesses, and patients can continue to have access to basic health care in their own communities.
- Providing nutritious food supplements to families with young children, to prevent child malnutrition during reported food shortages in rural communities.
- Making sure all our community clinics - even those without running water – have functional hand washing stations.
- Supporting families in learning ways to cope with fear and anxiety during this difficult time and letting them know that they are not alone.

Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 While Continuing to Provide Care in Rural Nicaragua (Continued)

By: The Communications Team at AMOS Health and Hope

Continuing to Provide Care in the Era of COVID-19

Aura Rivera is the health promoter of the rural community of Tapasle, in the mountains of Matagalpa. Recently, a woman named Eligia came to see her at the community clinic, presenting diarrhoea symptoms.

“I examined her and took her vital signs,” Aura said. “She wasn’t severely dehydrated, yet. I treated her with zinc tablets and had her drink oral rehydration fluids. I also counselled her on good personal and home hygiene practices, such as how to boil water before drinking it or cooking with it.

I gave her a 14-day course of medicines and advised her to be sure to complete the full treatment, even if she felt better before the end.”

Aura checked on Eligia by phone every few days and made sure she recovered completely.

Aura shared, “I am grateful to God and to AMOS supporters like you. I feel happy to be able to help people in need, and everyone in Tapasle is grateful, too. We don’t know what we would do without your support. Without medicines or a trained health promoter in the community, things would be so different.”

All of us are incredibly grateful to Operation Agri, for helping us continue training community health workers to save lives in remote communities in Nicaragua!

The IMARIKA Project - Participant Interview
By Andy Sharp

Tanzania

This is Mr. Isack Mvili the lead farmer of Usolanga village.

My name is Isack Mvili from Usolanga village, I am a Tumaini (meaning Hope) group member in the IMARIKA project. The group was formed in 2018 with Emmanuel International in collaboration with the Anglican Church Diocese of Ruaha. The purpose of this group was to strengthen our economy and environmental conservation.

We started by planting agricultural trees in a nursery, fruit trees such as pawpaw and moringa, the total number of trees we planted was 500 and in 2019/2020 and we planted 570 trees in our village.

Through IMARIKA we introduced the VICOBA programme (Village Community Bank) which helps us with savings and credit services within the group.

We Thank God

We thank God that last year Emmanuel International started teaching us beekeeping, the training was very good, and they brought us eight beehives. So far seven of the hives have bee colonies. In August 2020 we expect to start harvesting the honey.

We thank God that through this period we are learning how to grow our economy and VICOBA is really helping us to make money quickly which helps us pay school fees for our children and buy our daily basic needs.

This year we have a challenge with the COVID-19 epidemic which has affected the group activities, but our facilitators have helped us to have an assistant supervisor from our own village, so the activities are going well. In our areas we still do not have a COVID-19 patient.

Many thanks to Operation Agri for donating money which helps us to gain more knowledge.

Thank you.

From the Frying Pan into the Fire

By Diordre Moraes, Manager Partner Liaison at LEADS

(LEADS = Lanka Evangelical Alliance Development Service)

Sri Lanka

Living on Hand-Outs

The Operation Agri funded project supports families who have lived in the North of Sri Lanka through the thirty-year conflict, which ended eleven years ago in May 2009. Though the conflict ended, families faced various challenges and living on handouts was the norm.

With the outcome of Income Generation and Food Security for the selected families, plans were in place to form Self Help Groups (SHGs), Capacity Building of SHGs, exposure visits, and also to provide material support.

COVID-19 – Additional Stress

The COVID-19 global pandemic caused additional stress for the people and families living in the village of Mayavanoor where being a 'daily wage earner' is the norm. Although their village and district are not being directly affected, families were completely thrown off-guard, since they could not step out of their homes for work, school or to attend to any other needs.

A 100% lockdown and a curfew were imposed by the Government of Sri Lanka since the 20th of March 2020 as a means of containing the virus. Though the number of deaths is only nine, the Government took precautions for total lockdown of over 50 days.

Vasanthi – Three Goats but no Income

Vasanthi lives with her husband and three children. Her husband is a daily paid wage earner and due to the income being insufficient the two elder children also started working as day wage earners.

Through the generosity of Operation Agri, Vasanthi received three goats and she also started to make a type of tile using braided coconut leaves. From the three goats they received, they were able to increase the number of goats to ten, but due to the lockdown Vasanthi and her family could not work, and that meant they had no income.

"On the 24th of April, LEADS provided us with a pack of dry ration and this was not something we anticipated, so receiving this bag of rations was such a huge blessing!! These rations were sufficient for three weeks!! Fifty families in this village were provided with dry ration packs and we are extremely thankful to LEADS for their support, since this is something which we had never planned or thought of would happen" said Vasanthi.

From the Frying Pan into the Fire (Continued)

By Diordre Moraes, Manager Partner Liaison at LEADS

(LEADS = Lanka Evangelical Alliance Development Service)

A Pack of Dry Rations:

A pack of dry rations contains:

- 15kg of rice
- 2kg of lentils
- 675ml of oil
- 2 tins of canned fish
- 1kg of sprats (small, dried fish)
- 2 packets of soya meat (textured soy protein)
- 1,200g of salt
- 1kg of wheat flour
- 2kg of chickpeas
- 1.5kg of samaposha (a nutritious cereal supplement),
- 500g of spices
- 100g of tea
- 2kg of sugar.

What is the 'New-Norm'?

The next few months will be challenging as the 'new-norm' is yet unknown.

The planned activities will be carefully reviewed, with consideration on methods of implementation with the new regulations on public/social gatherings, and the methods to purchase materials for livelihoods too will need to be considered, since it is anticipated that food security will be a matter of concern.

As per a survey conducted by World Vision amongst 2,190 families in Sri Lanka, the income of USD 126 pre COVID-19 pandemic has dropped to USD 35 which has resulted in 50% of the families living off borrowings.

This has plunged families in the Mayavanoor Division in the District of Kilinochchi in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka into further hardship.

Pig Farming – A Change Maker
By Sujata Bandari, Community Health and Education Project,
(CHEP), Project Officer

Nepal

Pigs are my Piggybank

My new piggery farming is a 'Piggybank' for me. I am saving and investing in it and I know I will receive a good return one day, says Bhagpura Budha. Her words portray her confidence and enthusiasm.

Cheerful Bhagpura Budha cannot contain her excitement when a team from the Multipurpose Community Development Service, (MCDS), arrives at her community to review their progress in livestock farming. "I received three days of pig farming training and a pig from MCDS around three months ago. Moreover, the ward office provided one additional pig for participating in the MCDS piggery farming training. I believe I am now in a right direction to change my destiny from being nothing to something or someone", she exclaims with a big smile.

Introducing a Family of Beneficiaries

Bhagpura Budha is 45, comes from Kankri-2, Rukum East, has set an example in her community, and has been a source of motivation for her community. But things have not always been so easy.

Her husband is deaf and a disabled person and needs people to take care of him. Her only son works in a brick factory, and the eldest daughter takes care of the home while she goes around in the village as a daily wage earner.

When MCDS implemented their educational programme in the community school Bhagpura was encouraged to send her youngest daughter there and she has been actively attending regularly.

MCDS Intervention with Training

Bhagpura says, "Without the training, my family would have had a hard time managing our small pig rearing farm, because we only knew the traditional methods which are not efficient.

Now my pig farm is clean, and I provide hygienic fodder for them. Moreover, all my pigs have been vaccinated and insured." She, with 29 other participants from her community, received training from MCDS in pig management. They learned about vaccination, sanitation, insurance, fodder, and hygiene. Later she shared what she learned during the training with her family members who are assisting her in the management of the small piggery farm

Pig Farming – A Change Maker (Continued)
By Sujata Bandari, Community Health and Education Project,
(CHEP), Project Officer

Transformational Impact

Awareness of pig rearing in Bhagpura's community has significantly increased after she started her pig farm. Members of her community have been closely watching her progress and they too are enthusiastic about investing in pig rearing.

Bhagpura plans to use some of the profit from pig rearing to invest in her 6-year-old daughter's education. She is currently studying in class 1 and dreams of becoming a teacher.

A Female Voluntary Vet as a Power for Change
By Rajendra Thapa Magar, Community Health and Engineering for Social Transformation, (CHEST), Project Officer

Nepal

Introducing Ms. Rasmita Syangtan, a Beneficiary

Women living in developing countries like Nepal have to struggle a lot to prove their competency at every level. They lack proper knowledge of shed management, feed and fodder management, and have inadequate veterinary and service centre skills. They have to wait for the veterinary doctor and other technical people for the treatment of sick cattle and livestock.

This is true for Ms. Rasmita Syangtan, a livestock and dairy farmer in Ikudol Ward-5 of Bagmati Rural Municipality, Southern Lalitpur.

Rasmita Syangtan shares her experience, “I had very little awareness of government programmes, insurance policies, and other documentation work to be able to get a variety of livestock services and benefits from the local government.”

MCDS Provided the Training

Rasmita received 5 days Veterinary Training in livestock farming, to develop herself as a rural veterinary volunteer as a part of the Community Empowerment Building Programme implemented by the MCDS/CHEST project. Veterinary Training for livestock farming by MCDS/CHEST had focused on the development of community members skills for livestock farming. However, priority was given to promote women’s confidence in changing power relations, through increased access to resources and community level discourses that affected their lives.

After her learning experience Rasmita shared this, “At this moment, I feel that if I had not been exposed to these modern means, then our livestock practice would be the same. Even my lifewould be of no difference to an ordinary rural woman in Nepal. I learned so many technical and other official procedures to get benefits from the concerned office. Now, I am confident enough to raise livestock and increase income with less loss.

A Female Voluntary Vet as a Power for Change (Continued)
By Rajendra Thapa Magar, Community Health and Engineering for Social Transformation, (CHEST), Project Officer

Transformation has a Vital Impact

Rasmita has received tremendous support from her family who were made aware and sensitised by her. Moreover, she has been providing the veterinary service to the other which have been insured at a government office.

She is now able to gain the economic benefit of Rs 12,000, (about £80), every month which a year ago was only a small amount of Rupees 5,000-7,000, (about £33-£47).

She proudly shared:

“My economic and social transformation has been possible only because of the programme supported by MCDS”.

From her earnings she can now provide support for her children's education and medical expenses. Furthermore, she adds,

“From the extra that I now earn I can save and use the credit facilities of SHGs, (Self Help Groups), started through the help of MCDS, of which I am a member.”

COVID-19 in Malawi
By Rev Lloyd Chizenga, General Overseer,
New Life Christian Church (NLCC), Malawi

Malawi

A Sensitisation Tour

What is happening in Malawi with COVID-19? As a church, we are currently on a sensitisation tour, teaching the communities about how people can get COVID-19 and how to avoid getting it.

There is a lot of mis-information about, especially in the remote areas. The government is being supported by NGOs [Non-Governmental Organisations] and churches like ours to keep people informed. We are busy bringing awareness messages to rural communities about COVID-19.

Apparently, about 80 people have been found to be positive in Malawi. Twenty-four have recovered and three patients have died. The government tried to impose a national lockdown, but it did not work well because most of the people are poor. We live hand-to-mouth and there were no plans to help people financially so they could stay at home without starving.

As you may be aware, around 85% of the population lives in the rural areas, so they must continue farming, buying, and selling food.

Moral, Physical and Spiritual Effects

Besides the impact of COVID-19 on our livelihoods, it has also affected us morally, physically, and spiritually. We have a sense that some of our cultural tendencies have to be stopped. This includes having to follow social distancing guidelines and keeping at least a metre apart from others.

We have been told we must avoid hand shaking, and instead hand wash frequently with soap or sanitiser. There is also a ban on gatherings of more than 50 people. All these are new things in the Malawian setting. We are used to meeting in our hundreds even in rural communities.

Our government has been less strict than many others in Africa, but they are now saying we should wear a mask.

COVID-19 in Malawi (Continued)
By Rev Lloyd Chizenga, General Overseer,
New Life Christian Church (NLCC), Malawi

Sustainable Agriculture Project

In terms of the sustainable agriculture project we have been running with support from African Pastors Fellowship (APF) and Operation Agri, COVID-19 has had an impact.

Since we can only meet with 50 people and not more than that, we have had to pause meetings and training sessions with project beneficiaries.

Our community groups normally have around 120 people in them, so training must be reduced. We will pick up where we left off as soon as we are able. One thing we can do is to divide the community groups into more but smaller groups, to follow the guidance.

In the long term, COVID-19 has not affected the operations of the project so much, it has just slowed it down this year.

Providing Buckets, Soap, Sanitiser and Face Masks

One of the tasks I have been doing is to provide hand washing buckets, soap, sanitiser, and face masks to over 35 communities in the Chikwawa area. This is so important to stop COVID-19 spreading through our communities.

We have been supported by donors in the UK to do this, but we need more assistance so we can purchase more.

RAY of Hope for Pakistani Christians in COVID-19

By Nargus Azhar, Founder & Director, Light for the Nations, (LFTN), Pakistan

Pakistan

Introduction

Pakistan is an Islamic country but there are other religions like Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and some other communities. These communities are often targeted for acts of violence by extremists. Christians face discrimination in work and education, and usually only get jobs that are considered to be 'unclean'.

The majority of our Christians are poor, so their wives support them by doing work which is not normally acceptable in our society. Christian women working as domestic servants in Muslim households are particularly vulnerable to harassment. For these reasons, Light for the Nations (LFTN) started providing skills training for poor women, mostly, but not exclusively, Christian.

LFTN is a charitable, non-political, Social Welfare Organization. Its goal is to promote and implement community services, vocational training, and formal/non-formal education.

The Project

Through the valuable support of Operation Agri we were able to run two sewing, and two Adult Literacy Centres last year (2019) in which we have trained more than forty-four (44) young girls and women (reaching about 264 indirectly).

The ladies learn various types of hand sewing, machine stitching and embroidery, designing, pattern making, cutting, tailoring, and finishing of garments for children and ladies. Each training course lasts six months, after which the trainees are able to read and write, handle their finances, and get gainful employment as dressmakers.

Our graduates are working independently as self-employed people, and contribute to the development of their family and society. As a result, the social and economic conditions of the whole community are improving.

However, because of the COVID-19 problem the country is going through the lockdown situation. Everything and every workplace is closed. All boutiques, shops, factories, and offices are closed.

There is a huge economic deficit at the national level and on an individual level. With no work due to lockdown the conditions of the families is near to starving. There is no work, and no source of income but the daily needs are always there.

RAY of Hope for Pakistani Christians in COVID-19 (Continued)

By Nargus Azhar, Founder & Director, Light for the Nations, (LFTN), Pakistan

A Christian lady, Shumila

Shumila shared her story. "My husband is a plumber working on daily wages. I have four children (two boys and two girls). When the centre opened at our place, I joined and learned much, including stitching clothes for people at my house.

I was earning Pak Rs.350/- (about £1.80) for one suit. I was paying fees of my children monthly, and our economic condition was improving day by day. But because of this lock down situation my husband has no work, and no one came to our home to give me orders to stitch clothes. That's why we are suffering a lot. Sometimes we borrow money from our neighbours and relatives to fulfil the needs of the children.

We are thankful to Sister Linda; she sent food for one month and that was not only the food but a **Ray of hope** for our family. We are thankful to you for giving us skills because we hope that this situation will be changed and we will use these skills to earn money for our family."

A Young girl, Sumbal

Sumbal says, "I am B.A. student. I have six brothers and three sisters. My father was working as a sweeper in a Government office but because of his sickness he had to retire, but my mother is still working as a domestic worker. Two of my brothers work as waiters in a hotel and support the family.

They wish that instead of doing study I could work and support them. After learning from this sewing centre, I am paying my fee and supporting my family. But now, because of the lock down, there is no work.

brothers have lost their jobs and when my mother went to work the owner of the house stopped her and said go back to your home. They said that if they needed her, they would call. No one is coming to me to give orders for the stitching of clothes. So we are in a big financial crisis. I have no money to pay my fees.

We have hope in Jesus Christ that this lockdown will soon be finished and our situation will be changed and I will successfully use my skill."

RAY of Hope for Pakistani Christians in COVID-19 (Continued)

By Nargus Azhar, Founder & Director, Light for the Nations, (LFTN), Pakistan

A young girl Afia Hanif

Hanif said, "I am very keen to study. I am an FA student (Grade 12). We are four brothers and sisters. My father is working as a cleaner. My study was stopped after the completion of my Matriculation (Grade 10), because with the salary of my father it was not possible for me to continue my studies.

The sewing training centre has opened in our area and I learnt skills there. After learning these skills, I started to stitch the clothes of others, which helped me to earn money. With this money I started my study again and now I am in Grade 12. I am thankful to God that because of this skill I am paying the fees for my studies and my sister's studies.

During this COVID-19 and the lockdown situation the work of my father and my two brothers has stopped. Even my own stitching business has stopped. We were very much disturbed because the food items at our home are almost finished and we have no money to buy more.

We thank God that in this situation sister Linda provided these food items for us through LFTN which has changed our depression and hopelessness into happiness.

OA's Support

LFTN is grateful for Operation Agri's financial support, which enables this work to continue in other needy and deserving areas.

RAY of Hope for Pakistani Christians in COVID-19 (Continued)
By Nargus Azhar, Founder & Director, Light for the Nations, (LFTN), Pakistan

Tailpiece

Editor's note: After receiving the article from Light for the Nations an inquiry was made about the ladies who were part of the class. The following section was the response from the project.

Thanks for asking about our women's struggle in this lockdown situation, they are going through a very tough time. Those who were domestic workers have no job and those who stitched the clothes for others, they have no work. They are going through a vulnerable situation. When some of them shared their situation, they wept.

We have supported till 311 people by providing them food items and almost 200 more are still looking to us for support. There is risk in this Covid-19 situation. People are in bad condition they wish to do anything for money whatsoever the work is.

With a heavy heart I want to share with you that a few ladies have shared with me that they can do even adultery for their children and families, which is really very painful for me.

There are many other heart-breaking stories which they share with me; trust me I can't even share with you.

Please keep praying for them, our ladies and young girls are really in pain, one girl said her father asked her to go outside and find out some work, because her father was unable to find work himself.

Men and boys can easily be thieves, for their survival they can become criminals. Very, very hard time it is. Here, lockdown is partially ended but no-one is able to start work; no-one allows people to enter their business places and in houses. No work, no source of income, no hope. Pray that hope may overcome fear.

Impact of COVID-19 and Lockdown on Duaripara, Bangladesh

By Tarun Mondol, Director, Christian Ministry to Children and Youth (CMCY)

Bangladesh

COVID-19 and Gigantic Negative Effects

COVID-19 has caused gigantic negative effects on the populace wellbeing, society, education, and economy in Bangladesh. Lockdown began on 18th March 2020 and continues to date. Due to the impact, the dairy farmers, vegetable producers, pharmaceuticals and poultry farmers are in deep crisis, with lower prices for the products, and a lot of workers have lost their jobs as well.

The pandemic has seriously affected the educational systems, banking, readymade garments, remittance, communication, and markets.

The Asian Development Bank has estimated that Bangladesh will lose a significant percentage of its Gross Domestic Product in the worst-case scenario, and the outbreak of the COVID-19 will last at least six months.

The over-all situation with COVID-19 is getting worse day by day with innocent people dying. So far 610 people have died and more than 44,000 people have been infected with the COVID-19, (to May 31st), among them the poor, daily (hired) labour and the lower income groups who are at the greatest risk with their needs. They have lost their sources of income, resulting in no income, no food, starvation, physical and mental suffering, and rising criminalisation.

Even the household workers are not allowed to do the household works, so, it is true to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought much poverty, hunger, unhappiness, uncertainty and tension in the life of the nation.

Present situation of the project

Duaripara Family Development Project (DFDP) is a Project of CMCY in Partnership with Operation AGRI. DFDP works by spreading and achieving awareness on education, health and malnutrition, and saving the vulnerable poor women and children from commercial and sexual exploitation, trafficking, and slavery.

Duaripara is an overcrowded slum area. It is a big slum of around ten thousand poor migrated families, who came from the different remote villages due to natural calamities like flood, river erosion, cyclone, tidal surge and the torture of money lenders, in Bangladesh. The major slum-dwellers living in this slum are either victimised from the natural disasters or from local influential people.

Impact of COVID-19 and Lockdown on Duaripara, Bangladesh (Continued)

By Tarun Mondol, Director, Christian Ministry to Children and Youth (CMCY)

To the under-developed and migrated children and their families, DFDP has been a place of shelter and hope from where benefitted families have been given proper guidance, and the children have holistic care as they grow up. We have 124 girls from 109 families with 469 members in total. There are also 250 wider community members, 6 staff, and a Self Help Group of 109 women.

No Work – No Pay!

The parents of the girls are hardcore poor and illiterate; they are almost all day-labourers, hawkers, rickshaw-pullers, van-drivers, garment workers, small grocers, cleaners, and maid servants.

Major earnings are depended on, “No work no pay”. It is many days, running to weeks since these beneficiaries have been able to earn. As each day passes there is much hardship and mental agony. The women and children are the worst sufferers, they live in lockdown at home, forced to take immoral activities for mere survival and existence.

Besides that, there is harassment and bullying of the women and the children which is the common phenomena in their real life. The relief materials which they received are very scanty and insufficient for their needs. Even in the crisis, they have to pay their house rent, electricity bill, water bill and gas bill. Their girls, who are under the DFDP care, have prisoner life with their small rented houses.

Although they have sufficient educational materials which have been provided by the project, they are without the supervision and coaching support. Therefore, their education gets much hampered, as their illiterate parents can't help them with their studies.

Success Story

Mim is a girl of standard five, aged 12, and has come from a poor family background. She has one brother, and has lived with her father and family members, for more than 20 years in the Duaripara slum. Being migrated from the village home, her father started his career as a newspaper hawker, now he works as a driver under a businessman.

Her mother is a housewife who runs the family with much financial hardship as her father's earnings are not enough to live comfortably. They live in a small rented room. Her parents are not very literate. In January 2018 Mim came under the DFDP support.

Impact of COVID-19 and Lockdown on Duaripara, Bangladesh (Continued)
By Tarun Mondol, Director, Christian Ministry to Children and Youth (CMCY)

Since then she has greatly benefited from the services of the project. She received education coaching, education materials, knowledge on healthy living, and guidance on self-defence, along with all possible support to flourish her God given potential regularly. The project staff care and help her to grow up holistically.

The project care has made her much more conscious of how to behave politely, and also how to talk in a befitting manner with all. She is a model to her family members, guiding them to live hygienically and disciplined lives. It is obviously true that without the lessons of the project office she could not have such a proactive role to her family members as well as to friends to motivate them with decent lives. She is a blessing to her family and friends.

During the COVID-19 pandemic she keeps her family members clean, hygienic and safe, she is now much more secure and happier than before. She is brilliant and punctual. Her only dream is to become a nurse in the future. She is hopeful of having a better life with success and joy. She and her family members are very grateful to DFDP staff and the kind donors of Operation Agri, UK.

The project works sincerely with funding limitations for the beneficiaries and achieves much success. The office staff are working through mobile phone and trying their best to keep beneficiaries healthy in the lockdown situation of COVID-19.

Another True Story

Orpita (name changed for privacy) is a disabled girl, age 10. She is a DFDP supported girl who lives at the Duaripara slum along with her father and brother. Her mother lives away due to her job. Her father is a bus helper, and her brother is younger than her. In the daytime the guardian remains absent from home for work so both Orpita and her brother are mainly free to go elsewhere as they wish.

One afternoon in December 2018, while Orpita was playing at the Pallobi Degree College ground, a young college boy who lived adjacent to the college campus, took Orpita by force through a broken college window, abused and raped her.

Hearing this news from Orpita's playmates, her grandfather, came to rescue Orpita and took her to the local hospital for treatment. Hearing this sad news, DFDP staff went there and helped Orpita's father to file a case against the rapist. The staff also gave encouragement and counselling to Orpita's father to keep her with him, and then send her to their native village for her security and to regain mental strength.

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After spending some days there, she came back to the slum and joined school again. Here she received counselling and mental health treatment from the office and gradually recovered, now she daily attends the formal school.

The Way Forward

To overcome the big challenge of the above-mentioned situation of the women and the children, the staff of the Duaripara Family Development Project have been doing their best with limited resources. The six staff members advise people how to protect themselves from the abuse and slavery. The planned activities include education, family visits, counselling, social awareness building, rapport building, networking, and campaigning to ensure that community and wider community leaders participate.

We sincerely acknowledge that what DFDP does for the Duaripara slum beneficiaries depends on receiving kind funding from Operation Agri; it is like a drop of water that helps to make an ocean.

We serve the girls with education, sanitation awareness, and moral care - as we say, 'children are our future'. We find that girls who have benefitted from the project are playing important roles in their families and community with their income, awareness and having a model life to attract others. Apart from that, the voluntary, social, community awareness and counselling work is building up a healthy community, expanding the networking programme to protect the vulnerable builds up a happy and healthy model society.

Bangladesh is the most densely populated country of those with a population of over 10 million. We are living with much tension and anxiety as we consider the rapid infection rate and loss of life due to COVID-19.

So, we would like to say that it is not possible to mitigate the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic individually, but the integrated efforts from the state authority, donors, influential leaders, laymen as well as concerned humanitarian people of all sections need to come forward to safeguard the exploited community from the bondage of slavery.

And, at the end, may the Almighty, the merciful God, save us from the devil COVID-19 providing His blessing and might to protect the distressed people of the slum living in the darkness of the worst sufferings.

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