



GOAL is calling for a community centred, integrated approach to be at the heart of the international response to Covid-19. Here, GOAL Haiti is training staff in applying a Community-Led Action approach, funded by Irish Aid. Photo: GOAL.



DISCUSSION PAPER: COVID-19

Limiting the impact of COVID-19 on the world's most vulnerable

As the world grapples with the unprecedented COVID-19 public health crisis, GOAL is committed to doing everything it can to protect some of the world's most vulnerable populations in the Global South. GOAL is acutely aware that, as well as putting in place the necessary public health measures to respond to this crisis, there is an urgent need to address the growing secondary threats, some of them pre-existing. These include food insecurity and the loss of livelihoods; the severe strain on health systems globally and deepening inequalities for women and girls¹.

There are real concerns that Covid-19 will reverse the development gains the global community has been working towards in the effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030². The clarion call of 'Leaving No-One Behind', which is central to the SDGs, must now be similarly applied to how the global community deals with this pandemic and the resulting economic and social impacts. This will require the highest degree of solidarity, and international and regional cooperation to protect people across the globe.

Global Impact

As of June 3rd, there are over 190,000 confirmed coronavirus cases across GOAL's 13 countries of operation, with almost 4,000 confirmed deaths. It is likely the real figures are much higher, but limited capacity for testing and reporting obscures the true scale. It is likely that the world will not know the impact COVID-19 has had on demographics and on longer term health outcomes for some time.

In low income countries measures such as 'lockdowns', curfews, school closures and travel restrictions can have dire consequences. Confining people to their homes in densely populated areas, such as informal urban settlements and refugee camps, where physical distancing is impossible, can exacerbate the spread of the virus³ and significantly reduce household incomes which are reliant on daily wages. Reaching those affected by armed conflict is also a major challenge.

1 <https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-how-to-prevent-the-2020s-from-becoming-a-lost-decade-for-children-97211>

2 <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty>

3 https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/03/english_final_un-habitat_key_messages-covid19-informal_settlements.pdf

GOAL's Response

GOAL has unique expertise in delivering sustainable solutions that are relevant and effective for the communities it works in. This has been at the heart of GOAL's work over the past 40 years and was central to GOAL's response to the Ebola outbreaks in recent years. Across its 13 countries of operation, GOAL

has launched rapid responses to the pandemic to assess the needs of the communities we work with. An internal COVID-19 GOAL Taskforce has been established and a Global Response Plan is being rolled out which is aligned with the UN Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19⁴.

Global Response

While we all respond to the immediate challenge of stopping the spread of the virus, treating those who are ill and protecting the most vulnerable in society, actions which will limit the devastating impact in the medium to longer term must be taken now. The scale and severity of this crisis demands brave and bold action by those in power across the globe. International cooperation has never been so desperately needed.

GOAL is calling for a community centred, integrated approach to be at the heart of the international response, and on the international community to urgently work together to prevent the loss of life and livelihoods by focusing on actions in six key areas.

1. Humanitarian Response



Humanitarian Response: GOAL Emergency Response Team Leader Esmaeel Esmaeel organized cash transfer distribution for IDP families in Northwestern Syria. Photo: GOAL.

It was predicted that nearly 168 million people would need humanitarian assistance and protection in 2020. According to the UN, this represents around 1 in 45 people in the world and is the highest figure in decades. The impacts of climate change and growing weather-related and other disasters continue to pose an additional challenge. COVID-19 has already disrupted global supply chains and has led to the UN to call for \$6.69 billion in extra funding⁵.

Those living in fragile and conflict affected states such as Syria, South Sudan, Sudan, Niger, Uganda, Ethiopia, Iraq and Haiti are amongst the most in need. Conflict continues to wreak havoc, destroy societies and displace communities across the world. Now is time to unite with a greater focus on building social cohesion and addressing the underlying drivers of conflict.

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting social cohesion by increasing distrust between communities, with

4 <https://www.unocha.org/story/un-issues-2-billion-appeal-combat-covid-19>

5 <https://www.unocha.org/story/un-issues-2-billion-appeal-combat-covid-19>

stigmatisation and scapegoating of minorities, refugees and migrants. GOAL witnesses widening fear and mistrust within communities, and exclusion of groups from access to services, resources and participation in response efforts. In addition to considering specific conflict dynamics, there is also a need to consider the differences between contexts, and that the people being supported may prioritise other needs besides COVID-19.

GOAL is working with communities affected by humanitarian crisis to ensure they receive any assistance they need as quickly as possible. GOAL teams are also on the ground supporting communities and local partners to work together to avert conflict and build social cohesion.

In addition, GOAL's humanitarian team and country teams continue to monitor national early warning systems and prepare additional capacities to help minimize consequences on individuals, communities, governments and systems of other non-Covid-19 related emergencies that might arise. These include responses to floods, locusts, drought, cholera, malaria, Ebola and other diseases in countries like Syria, Ethiopia, Honduras, Sudan,

South Sudan, Sierra Leone and Haiti, often in partnership with local authorities or the Ministries of Health.

In the rush to respond to COVID-19 those who were already in need of humanitarian assistance must not be forgotten.

GOAL is asking that:

- **Humanitarian response plans must be fully funded**, and definitions of vulnerability carefully examined to ensure those at risk and in need can be supported⁶.
- Warring parties must heed the **Global Ceasefire call** which has been led by the UN Secretary-General⁷.
- **Exemptions from movement restrictions for Humanitarian NGO** workers are needed to reach the most vulnerable communities in accordance with the Humanitarian principles. Equally, **essential global supply chains need to be maintained** to ensure the delivery of essential drugs, medical equipment, food assistance, hygiene kits and other non-food items⁸.



Health Response: GOAL staff distribute hand sanitiser and broadcast COVID-19 health messaging from mobile loudspeaker units in Mutare city, Zimbabwe. Photo: GOAL.

Covid-19 has overwhelmed and stretched even the most well-resourced health systems in the world. In the world's poorest countries where health systems are chronically underfunded and understaffed, COVID-19 will present huge challenges. Health systems will require significant support to ensure they can continue to provide the services and treatments their communities need.

Across all country programmes GOAL is working in coordination with local partners, Ministries of Health and key UN agencies to prevent the spread of the disease. GOAL is supporting local governments to establish and maintain infection prevention and control standards which will protect health workers and patients and minimise the risk of transmission. GOAL's Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) centres on Community-Led Action (CLA) which enables people to understand

6 https://voiceeu.org/publications?string=COVID-19+and+humanitarian+action%3A+VOICE+key+messages&start_date=&end_date=

7 <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/update-secretary-general%E2%80%99s-appeal-global-ceasefire>

8 https://voiceeu.org/publications?string=COVID-19+and+humanitarian+action%3A+VOICE+key+messages&start_date=&end_date=

COVID-19 and take contextually appropriate action to protect themselves and their communities while continuing with daily life. Community members decide how they will ensure good hygiene practices, re-design community hubs to facilitate physical distancing, stay at home without going hungry, monitor entry into the community, seek medical attention for those who are sick, and shield older people and those with underlying medical problems. GOAL is using this approach with communities in Sudan, South Sudan, Haiti, Sierra Leone, Niger, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Ethiopia, Uganda, Niger and Honduras.

GOAL will also continue to support the strengthening of health systems to build longer-term resilience to infectious diseases and other shocks and stresses, including in Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone. GOAL will support the Ministry of Health and other health partners to undertake analysis of the health system in relation to the most likely shocks (such as disease outbreaks) and stresses (such as climate change) to reveal where preparedness efforts to ensure continuity of services needs to be focused.

GOAL is asking that:

- **Community healthcare initiatives** must be at the centre of the world's response to COVID-19⁹. Lessons learned from the response to Ebola outbreaks show that community engagement is key to slowing and stopping the spread of these deadly diseases¹⁰.
- Donors and Governments commit to **long term investment in building resilient and adaptive national health systems** which include a multi-sectoral approach to the integration of disaster risk management and public health; and **universal and non-discriminatory access to medical treatments, equipment and vaccines**¹¹.
- The international community must take coordinated action to put in place a **global system for Early Warning and Response to infectious diseases**.

3. Food Security and Nutrition



Food Security and Nutrition: A locust swarm in the Borena region of Ethiopia in mid-February of 2020. Photo: GOAL

The World Food Programme warns that the Covid-19 pandemic will see more than a quarter of a billion people suffering acute hunger by the end of the year¹². Restrictions on movement within and across countries can hinder food-related logistic services, disrupt entire food supply chains, and affect the availability of food. Impacts on the movement of agricultural labour and on the supply of inputs are posing critical challenges to food production. The 2020 Global Nutrition Report warns that

those suffering from under nutrition are more susceptible to COVID-19 and risk more severe complications¹³. Even before COVID-19 hit, 135 million people on the planet were already struggling with acute food insecurity due to pre-existing shocks or crises¹⁴. Also, for vulnerable, urban populations dependent on street vendors and markets for their provision of food, lockdown measures preventing traders' access to the city could prove disastrous.

9 <https://stories.msf.ie/covid-19--/index.html>

10 <https://www.goalglobal.org/stories/how-the-ebola-epidemic-has-prepared-goal-staff-to-fight-covid-19-in-sierra-leone/>

11 [COVID 19: PANDEMIC RESPONSE PLAN, ONE, 16 April 2020](#)

In addition, the current locust outbreak in the Horn of Africa is a crisis within a crisis that is putting the food security and livelihoods of millions of people at risk. Left untreated this outbreak will cause up to \$8.5 billion worth of loss damage by the end of 2020¹⁵.

GOAL is working with local partners to ensure lifesaving and life sustaining nutrition programming continues for adults and children at risk of malnutrition across all countries of operation. This programming includes the treatment of acute malnutrition in hospital settings and in the community, stabilisation centres, outreach therapeutic programs and targeted supplementary feeding programmes for infants and young children. Throughout these programmes, GOAL is ensuring guidance on risk minimisation of transmission to ensure staff and participant safety.

Those living in conflict zones, those displaced in their own countries and those living in refugee camps are especially vulnerable to food insecurity, including in north-eastern Syria where GOAL delivers lifesaving and life-sustaining services to up to one million people every year. Likewise, in both Zimbabwe and South Sudan, approximately half of the population are estimated to be in need of food support following a third consecutive year of drought in 2019¹⁶. These numbers are likely to increase substantially over the course of 2020. In our programmes, GOAL is providing targeted food aid and unconditional cash assistance to help communities access basic food and agriculture inputs.

The international community must take decisive collective action to prevent the main drivers of malnutrition and food insecurity.

GOAL is asking that:

- Governments quickly move to **implement pro-poor social protection programmes. Targeted assistance** in the form of **cash assistance and**, where markets are not sufficiently functional, **food aid and climate smart agricultural inputs**, must be made available for those at risk of further shocks, food insecurity and malnutrition.
- Countries must be supported to implement **broad-scale measures to control locust invasions**, addressing this major crisis within the Covid-19 crisis. This includes providing rapid and flexible financing and technical support to countries affected by the outbreak. Governments are encouraged to **exempt locust control, surveillance, response activities and technical staff from movement restrictions to help control the locust invasions**¹⁷.
- **The continuation of essential curative nutrition care services** for acute malnutrition (IMAM) with integrated Infection Prevention Control messaging to protect health staff and clients must be secured during the crisis.

12 <https://insight.wfp.org/covid-19-will-almost-double-people-in-acute-hunger-by-end-of-2020-59df0c4a8072>

13 <https://globalnutritionreport.org/reports/2020-global-nutrition-report/2020-global-nutrition-report-context-covid-19/>

14 <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1269721/icode/>

15 <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/locust-plague-fighting-crisis-within-crisis>

16 <https://insight.wfp.org/zimbabwe-in-the-grip-of-hunger-4a689447acbc>

17 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/RDLA_Addressing%20the%20Double%20Crisis%20of%20Locusts%20and%20COVID-19_EN.pdf

4. Livelihoods, Resilience and Economic Recovery



Livelihoods, Resilience and Economic Recovery: Young women work in the fish processing plant supported by GOAL's MiPescas programme in La Mosquita region, Honduras. Photo: GOAL.

COVID-19 threatens to roll back the development gains which have been so hard fought for by the most vulnerable communities across the globe. The global recession has direct repercussions in GOAL programme countries, and its impact further exacerbates increasing rates of hunger and poverty, as well as challenges including the desert locust outbreak, early droughts, conflict and insecurity.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has warned that 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy – about half the total global workforce – are at risk of losing their livelihoods¹⁸. Access to predictable social assistance, in the form of cash or in-kind transfers, as well as specific labour-related guarantees, is key to mitigating the direct economic impacts of the pandemic on households and communities. Social protection will be an essential strategy to ensuring an inclusive recovery pathway¹⁹, enhancing the ability of households to progressively rebuild their livelihoods, invest in economic activities and manage multiple risks.

In addition, 64 countries globally – including 30 in sub-Saharan Africa – spend more on repaying debt than investing in public health²⁰. Governments should not have to make impossible choices between repaying debt and providing necessary support and services in the wake of COVID-19. Cancelling debt for at least 2 years, will allow these countries to focus on implementing social safety nets and in the medium

term building their societies back better²¹.

It is also clear that solutions to the current public health crisis cannot be found without taking climate and the environment into consideration. Now is a critical time to build economies and societies equipped to tackle structural inequalities, and to re-organize our societies and global economic systems so there is a sustainable future for all on our planet²². The SDGs call for the world to 'Leave No-One Behind' is more relevant than ever before. The SDGs provide the foundation and principles to ensure any future recovery is sustainable and puts people at the heart of social and economic development.

GOAL supports vulnerable communities through a range of measures aimed at stabilizing critical market systems and enabling continuity of micro and small enterprises in the informal sector. Measures prioritised include access to basic needs through cash transfers for vulnerable households, Infection Prevention Control (IPC) in public spaces, such as food and animal markets, remote monitoring of food and commodity prices and market information dissemination. In Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Honduras, GOAL is increasingly supporting grants to small businesses along the food, agriculture and hygiene product supply chain, to maintain and protect their existing production and distribution systems, critical to local economies and peoples access to essential good and service.

18 https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_743036/lang--en/index.htm

19 <http://www.fao.org/3/ca8631en/ca8631en.pdf>

20 [COVID 19: PANDEMIC RESPONSE PLAN](#), ONE, 16 April 2020

21 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/30/opinion/coronavirus-debt-africa.html>

22 <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/un-urges-countries-%E2%80%98build-back-better%E2%80%99>

Access to financial services is critical for cash transfers and the protection of assets as well as business continuity to support small business to adapt their business models in the context of COVID 19.

Now more than ever, support from governments is needed to ensure the most vulnerable people are not pushed further into chronic and extreme poverty.

GOAL is asking that:

- Governments quickly move to **implement social protection programmes, including cash assistance**, to stop the most vulnerable individuals and families from falling further into poverty²³ and supporting households to progressively rebuild their livelihoods.

- **All debts payable in 2020 and 2021 must be cancelled for the poorest countries.** The decision to pause debt repayment by the G20 until the end of 2020 is welcome, but it is now time for all lending institutions to take the bold step of cancelling this debt until at least the end of 2021²⁴.

- As we are planning the Covid-19 recovery, this is an **opportunity to build back better societies and economies**. Recovery measures must **hold the SDG principles at heart** to tackle structural inequalities, climate change and protect the environment to help build sustainable communities and economies. They must also address the climate injustices faced by the world's poorest by ensuring adequate financing for resilience building programmes²⁵.



Gender and Protection: A young mother and her child in Bazel Bridge, outside of Mutare, Zimbabwe, where GOAL staff broadcast COVID-19 public health messaging from mobile loudspeaker units and using posters. Photo: GOAL

COVID-19 will exacerbate existing challenges for women and girls economically, physically, and socially²⁶. The United Nations Population Fund Agency (UNFPA) has issued a stark and sober warning on the impact of COVID-19 will have on women and girls. It

is predicted that a staggering 31 million additional cases of gender-based violence can be expected to occur because of lockdown measures globally²⁷. Livelihoods are curtailed or lost, children lose out on vital school feeding programmes²⁸ and women and

23 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialprotection/brief/social-protection-and-covid-19>

24 <https://www.financialjustice.ie/news/2020/04/07/coronavirus-cancel-global-south-debts/>

25 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1062752>

26 http://digitallibrary.in.one.un.org/TempPdfFiles/4896_1.pdf

27 <https://www.unfpa.org/news/millions-more-cases-violence-child-marriage-female-genital-mutilation-unintended-pregnancies>

28 <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/globalcoalition>

girls²⁹ struggle to access services and are more at risk of violence in the home³⁰. In addition, COVID-19 threatens to disrupt the much-needed delivery of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services in humanitarian and fragile settings³¹.

GOAL is training COVID 19 responders to be aware of how to support victims of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and child abuse safely and confidentially. GOAL teams are working closely with health facilities and outreach workers to establish and strengthen community-based protection structures and referral systems for those at risk and in need of protection and support. Equally GOAL teams are including guidance for health staff on child-friendly communication and implementing special measures to support children's psychosocial well-being when undergoing treatment and quarantine. GOAL has established feedback and complaints mechanisms for reporting Gender Based Violence and other issues. GOAL is also offering psychological support to health workers, most of them female, that may face stigmatisation, fear, and trauma due to Covid-19.

GOAL is asking that:

- **Women and girls be at the centre** of all responses to the crisis. There is evidence that COVID-19 is

compounding and amplifying gender inequality in all its forms. Governments and civil society must ensure the **protection of those women most at risk** of violence, exploitation, and discrimination, including minority groups, and migrant refugee and internally displaced populations³².

- Ensure that **sexual and reproductive health services are fully funded** within COVID-19 appeals and donors make particular reference in proposal calls.
- National governments must urgently be supported to work with communities at a local level to **prevent a sharp rise in gender-based violence and child abuse cases and ensure the continuation of protection services**.

6. Official Development Assistance and Finance for Development



Humanitarian Response: GOAL Honduras staff loading liquid soaps, sanitizers, and COVID-19 awareness communications materials for dispatch to the remote La Mosquita region of North East Honduras where GOAL supports approximately 50,000 artisanal fishermen. Supported by Irish Aid the materials will be airlifted to La Mosquita by the Honduran government. Photo: GOAL.

29 <http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/covid-19-school-closures-why-girls-are-more-risk-13406>

30 https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_women_9_apr_2020_updated.pdf

31 <https://cdn.iawg.rygn.io/documents/IAWG-COVID-ADVOCACY-STATEMENT-BRIEF-05.13.2020.pdf?mtime=20200513170717&focal=none>

32 'COVID-19 and Conflict', Policy Brief from the Bond Conflict Policy Group, April 2020

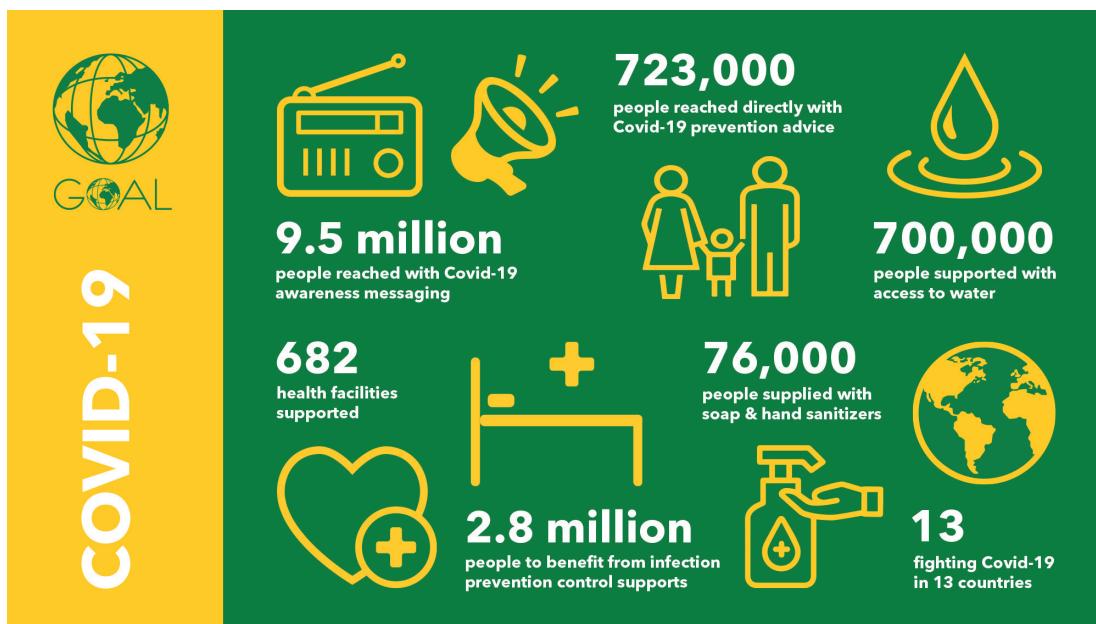
In the OECD's 2020 Development Cooperation Peer Review of Ireland³³, Ireland's overseas aid is commended for its exemplary efforts to leave no-one behind as it seeks to achieve the clear targets set by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Its commitment to civil society and multilaterals was also evident.

Financing for development involves several instruments including greater tax justice and debt relief. The commitment to funding quality humanitarian and development programmes through Official Development Assistance (ODA) is needed more than ever. Overseas development aid is a vital lifeline for some of the most vulnerable communities across the world and enables people to meet their basic needs and over time move out of poverty. As the Covid-19 crisis escalates there will be an increase in the numbers of people who need support and it is imperative that no-one is left behind. Without quality overseas development aid, millions more people are at risk of poverty, hunger and disease.

GOAL is currently working closely with local communities, partners and authorities in 13 countries around the world, implementing a community centred and integrated approach to supporting community preparedness, emergency interventions and programmes for economic recovery.

GOAL is asking that:

- Ireland maintain its existing investment to overseas development assistance by **protecting the current budget levels and making progress towards spending 0.7% of GNI on overseas aid**. This funding commitment should include support to civil society partners as well as multilateral organisations such as the World Health Organisation.
- Ireland continues to ensure its **overseas aid programme is of a high quality and is poverty focused, grant based and un-tied**, to deliver on both the Sustainable Development Goals and Ireland's International Development Policy, 'A Better World'.
- All **EU donor countries must maintain their current investments to overseas development assistance**, keeping up the momentum to reach the target of 0.7% of GNI to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals.
- We also recommend that the EU agree on an **ambitious external action heading in the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-27 and that the humanitarian aid allocation is increased** and additional³⁴.



33 <http://www.oecd.org/ireland/oecd-development-co-operation-peer-reviews-ireland-2020-c20f6995-en.htm>

34 Post COVID-19: EU humanitarian aid in the next Multiannual Financial Framework' - VOICE Policy Resolution 2020: <https://voiceeu.org/publications>

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