

PANDEMIC 2019: OUR PREPAREDNESS TOWARDS CHILD PROTECTION DURING CRISIS



18th April 2020

On April 8th, 2020, amidst the lockdown and rise in COVID-19 cases, I read that 94,000 calls were recorded on a National Protection Toll free number in India! These were none other than cases registered under Child Abuse.

The crisis caused by the pandemic has a potentially far-reaching, long-term negative impact on children around the world. The impact is likely to be devastating, even though children who contract the infection appear to have less severe symptoms and lower mortality rates than other age groups. The situation has left 1.5 billion students out of schools, loss of jobs and income across the globe. The world-wide economic insecurity is likely to expose the vulnerable be it, **child labor, sexual exploitation, teenage pregnancy, neglect or child marriage.**

Arising stress among families, particularly those living under quarantines and lockdowns with restrictions on freedom of movement, may increase the incidence of violence at home. As the global death toll of COVID-19 rises, large numbers of children will be left orphaned and vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Looking at the increasing number of cases getting reported, we need to understand the basics of Child Abuse. Child mistreatment includes all types of abuse and neglect of a child under the age of 18 by a parent, caregiver or another person in a custodial role that results in harm, potential for harm or threat of harm to a child.

There are four common types of child mistreatment: -

- **Physical abuse** is the use of physical force, such as hitting, kicking, shaking, burning or other show of force against a child.
- **Sexual abuse** involves inducing or coercing a child to engage in sexual acts. It includes behaviours such as fondling, penetration and exposing a child to other sexual activities.
- **Emotional abuse** refers to behaviour that harm a child's self-worth or emotional well-being. Examples include name calling, shaming, rejection, withholding love and threatening.
- **Neglect** is the failure to meet a child's basic physical and emotional needs. These needs include housing, food, clothing, education and access to medical care.

Why should children undergo such mistreatment? Aren't they already being challenged enough and coping with the lockdown situation, better than adults in many cases?

Fairtrade Network of Asia and Pacific Producers (NAPP) follows protocols that are listed in its Protection Policy for Children and Vulnerable Adults such as:

- ✓ We treat children with respect regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, nationality, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.
- ✓ We believe not to use language or behaviour towards children that is inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, demeaning or culturally inappropriate.
- ✓ We do not engage in any form of sexual harassment, discrimination or related misconduct with any person below and above the age of 18 years working at NAPP, producer organizations or partner organizations
- ✓ We do not hire children for domestic or other labour which is inappropriate given their age or developmental stage and interferes with their time available for education and recreational activities, or which places them at a significant risk of injury.
- ✓ We believe to be constructive to ensure protective systems are created in our producer's organizations.

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You can be **Champions for Children** in your community during this lockdown period:

- ✓ **Be a Nurturing Adult** – Children need to know that they are special, loved and capable to follow their dreams.
- ✓ **Help a Friend, Neighbour or Relative Child** – In case you know that a child is getting affected by any sort of abuse – don't be a silent spectator: Voice out your concern and help protect the Child who is impacted.
- ✓ **Help Yourself** – If you are facing any issues and need support to keep your child safe, call on the local protection system of your country and ensure you don't take that frustration out on the child.
- ✓ **If you hear a child cry for help** – It can be frustrating to hear a baby cry. Learn to give them attention for it might be a situation that they are unable to voice out.
- ✓ **Get Involved** -Fairtrade Producer organizations could form a group of **Champions for children-COVID19 Rescue Team**. By doing this the producers can build their own protection system and can write to Regional Managers of NAPP for any additional support required.

Possible work involved: -

- *Online Learning support for children – sharing accurate educational learning material.*
- *Sharing books – Supporting children's learning by starting a library and enlisting volunteers to support in delivering the books to their homes.*
- *Come up with more innovative options to protect and support our children.*

During the lockdown period, we are connecting with our producer organization to orient them on NAPP Protection Policy for Children and Vulnerable Adults and increase their awareness on the negative impacts during such crisis on the vulnerable. We also plan to roll out online awareness programs on gender and sexual health of women by integrating gender into Disaster Relief Programs as below:

1. Awareness/Training to our producer organizations on Impact of Gender during disaster and how to cope; with focus on Sexual health / domestic violence. This is to be considered as "**SYSTEM STRENGTHENING PROCESS**" under Gender Leadership School. These programs will start with the Producer Organizations enrolled under NAPP Gender Leadership School and subsequently cover others in the system. The training kit will include emergency contact numbers of Short Stay homes, Relief camps, Help line, Health Camps and other emergency reporting numbers.
2. Creating IEC material for equality approach to address the impact:
 - Disaster awareness for women
 - Precaution and coping mechanism for children and women.
 - Focus on Migrants, Tribal, Dalits (ethnic groups in India that have been kept depressed by subjecting them to untouchability) and other marginalized communities.

If you wish to get in touch then write to us at comms@fairtradenapp.org or reach out to your respective Regional General Managers.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sanjeet Singh Khurana', with a horizontal line underneath.

Sanjeet Singh Khurana
Chief Operations Officer