



Voices from the Frontline of Covid-19

What can we learn about achieving the SDGs at community level?

About this report

This report is a synthesis of the 50 'Voices from the Frontline' stories commissioned by the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN)ⁱ and International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD)ⁱⁱ. The stories aim to capture the hopes, fears, everyday coping strategies and longer-term aspirations for resilience and wellbeing of people living across Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Every story documents the experiences of community members in their own voice and in real time. The snapshots are from the period June 2020 to October 2021. Each one includes further analysis by a local interviewer, who comes from a non-governmental organisation (NGO), labour union, research institute or university.

The 'Voices from the Frontline' stories are published in full on both CDKN'sⁱⁱⁱ and ICCCAD's^{iv} websites, and the synthesis narrative on a dedicated website (www.cdkn.org/voices) which includes hyperlinks to the original stories. The regional maps of 'Contributing Voices' from page 4-7 show where the stories come from, including the interviewers and interviewees involved.

By capturing these unique and individual stories, and by presenting their common threads in this

synthesis report, CDKN and ICCCAD hope to deepen understanding among a broad range of actors about how resilience is forged and strengthened at community level.

In these pages are insights for local and national governments, NGOs, community-based organisations, federations of grassroots organisations, donors and development partners, researchers and academics. It is hoped that the lessons and recommendations that emerge from these stories of coping with Covid-19, climate change and other compounding shocks may inform responses to future shocks.

The 'Voices from the Frontline' project is part of a larger initiative by the [Global Resilience Partnership](http://www.globalresiliencepartnership.org)^v on 'Learning from Covid-19 to create a new normal for the resilience of the most vulnerable'.

The editors of the 'Voices from the Frontline' series were Shahrin Mannan and Maheen Khan of ICCCAD, with Mairi Dupar of CDKN. This report was written by Mairi Dupar and Shahrin Mannan.

The authors would like to thank Dr Saleemul Huq of ICCCAD, Dr Shehnaaz Moosa, Lucia Scodanibbio, Emma Baker and Lisa McNamara of CDKN, Nathaniel Matthews and Albert Norström of GRP for their review.

i <http://www.cdkn.org/>

ii <http://www.icccad.net/>

iii <https://cdkn.org/2020/07/feature-voices-from-the-frontline-of-the-covid-19-crisis-in-local-communities/>

iv <https://www.icccad.net/category/voices-from-the-frontline/>

v <http://www.globalresiliencepartnership.org/>



Sussundenga, Mozambique: A woman-led agri-business has made itself resilient to multiple shocks. © iDE Mozambique

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Dharavi, an informal settlement in Mumbai, India, was recognised as a special zone due to its high population density and inadequate basic services. © Urbz

Introduction

We live in difficult times. At the time of writing (early October 2021), Covid-19 has infected well over 237 million people worldwide and caused more than 4.8 million deaths ([World Health Organization](#)).¹ As well as a health crisis of tragic proportions, it is a socioeconomic crisis. The shockwaves of death and illness, as well as lockdown measures intended to stop its spread, have reached far into communities – affecting the most economically and socially vulnerable the worst.

Local communities and their networks on the frontline are self-organising to combat the spread of the virus and support the most vulnerable. Such spontaneous, self-organising community resilience is proving to be a crucial element in navigating this exceptional disruption.

In mid-2020, the [International Centre for Climate Change and Development \(ICCCAD\)](#)² and the [Climate and Development Knowledge Network \(CDKN\)](#)³ joined together to gather and publish stories from their networks of community-based organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) across Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Latin America, to tell how people at community level are coping with Covid-19: the 'Voices from the Frontline' series. ICCAD and CDKN, as their names suggest, are organisations that are principally concerned with climate change and how to create greater resilience and adaptive capacity to deal with its impacts. So, why create this series on Covid-19?

The reality is that Covid-19 has compounded the challenges that countless local communities are already facing at the intersection of climate vulnerability, economic poverty, lack of development services and political marginalisation. Yet, these communities have already devised and, over time, have strengthened their coping strategies for dealing with multiple hazards and risks. They have found that their diverse ways of being resilient – involving everything from women's networks to savings and loans associations to community radio outlets – have proven indispensable in responding to Covid-19. They have drawn on, built upon and extended these forms of community organisation and leadership to respond to the new and evolving crisis. They have a

lot to tell the rest of the world about what resilience looks like and how people in partnership, led by community priorities, can re-establish progress on the [United Nations' 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals](#).⁴

The intention of the Voices from the Frontline series is to provide testimonies of communities' resilience and leadership during these unprecedented times – to act as chroniclers of an age. A further aim of the series is to identify specifically what communities say they need, in terms of support from external actors. The Voices from the Frontline initiative comprises part of a larger initiative of the [Global Resilience Partnership](#)⁵ on 'Learning from Covid-19 to create a new normal for the resilience of the most vulnerable'.

The history of development policies within countries and international development efforts between countries is littered with well-intentioned initiatives that backfire, because their design fails to incorporate the priorities and capacities of the people they are meant to serve. The Voices from the Frontline stories, by contrast, are rich with statements of *what communities have done for themselves and what they want*.

The following report presents a synthesis of key learning from community initiatives in addressing the Covid-19 crisis in combination with multiple other hazards and risks, including weather and climate risks. It is not intended to be a systematic or representative survey of local communities. Rather, the editors intentionally reached out to grassroots groups and their federations, especially women- and youth-led groups in marginalised communities. These range from informal settlements with few or no government services, to remote rural communities. The aim of the series has been to give a space to the voices that are not normally heard on international platforms.

Each Voices from the Frontline story can be read individually and in its entirety on the [ICCCAD](#)⁶ or [CDKN](#)⁷ websites. Each story has essentially two parts: first, it describes the actions and opinions of community activists and entrepreneurs in their own words. Second, each story has been documented by an interviewer from a local civil society organisation, NGO or university, whose biographical profile and

organisation is also detailed, with their analytical perspective on their community's challenges and achievements.

Although the stories published under the Voices from the Frontline initiative describe difficult times, the stories' ultimate message is of hope and inspiration. They turn a lens on the extraordinary ingenuity and determination of people to help each other and create lasting community development solutions out of short-term humanitarian crises.

The following chapters synthesise these many stories from around the world and look at them through the prism of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and what communities have done to retain hard-won development in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis and other multiple shocks.

Each chapter provides insights into specific challenges posed to the advancement of key SDGs at community level: SDG1 (end poverty), SDG2 (end hunger), SDG3 (healthy lives), SDG5 (empowerment of women and girls), SDG6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG13 (climate action) and SDG17 (partnerships). The chapters describe, through anecdotes, how local people's ingenuity and coping actions are delivering on these goals in the short-term, and what external support is needed for longer-term solutions. A cross-cutting chapter at the end considers the roles of appropriate finance, innovation and political empowerment to achieve development progress. A final chapter provides conclusions and recommendations for the global community, particularly in light of COP26 and the UNFCCC process, the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction and the UNDRR process.



Young people created a new Ghanaian agribusiness during the pandemic, which aims to be climate-smart, too. © Sedem.

About the contributors

Africa

1. Title: How Zimbabwean youth are leading the way in tackling Covid-19

https://cdkn.org/2020/07/feature-how-zimbabwean-youth-are-leading-the-way-in-tackling-covid-19/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Harare, Zimbabwe
Interviewer: Artwell Nyirenda

Interviewees: Lonica Kenneth, Steven Nyamapfeka, Phillip Matamande

2. Title: Coping with COVID-19 by mobilising local capacities in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo

https://cdkn.org/2020/08/feature-coping-with-covid-19-by-mobilising-local-capacities-in-goma-democratic-republic-of-congo/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Interviewer: Habimana Jonas
Interviewees: Barengeke Ngingi

3. Title: Women's group boosts resilience in the face of crisis

https://cdkn.org/2020/06/feature-womens-group-boosts-resilience-in-the-face-of-crisis/?loclang=en_gb

Location: The Gambia

Interviewers: Hbibatou Drammeh and Ebrima S. F. Bah
Interviewee: Mama Jobe Jeng

4. Title: Kenya – Indigenous women overcome discrimination to lead community COVID-19 responses

https://cdkn.org/2020/08/feature-kenya-indigenous-women-overcome-discrimination-to-lead-community-covid-19-responses/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Kenya

Interviewer: Rose Wamalwa

Interviewees: Diana Noormishuki Chesengei and Evelin Namalwa

5. Title: Isiolo County, Kenya: Local radio stations create awareness of COVID-19, gender-based violence

https://cdkn.org/2020/09/isiolo-county-kenya-local-radio-stations-create-awareness-of-covid-19-gender-based-violence/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Kenya

Interviewer: David Nangaa Silakan

Interviewees: Grace Lolim and Rose Ngoilelo Orguba

6. Title: Belhar, South Africa – How a non-profit organisation is leading multi-racial, sustainable solutions

https://cdkn.org/2020/10/feature-belhar-south-africa-how-a-non-profit-organisation-is-leading-multi-racial-sustainable-solutions/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

Interviewer: Beauty Mani Paulo

Interviewee: Grandle Opperman

7. Title: Sussundenga, Mozambique – How an agri-business has made itself resilient to multiple shocks

https://cdkn.org/2020/11/feature-sussundenga-mozambique-how-an-agri-business-has-made-itself-resilient-to-multiple-shocks/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Sussundenga district, Mozambique

Interviewer: Doreen Tekedese

Interviewee: Amélia Rendição

8. Title: Korogocho, Kenya – The power of art during crisis

https://cdkn.org/2020/11/kenya-art-during-crisis/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Nairobi, Kenya

Interviewer: Daniel Onyango

Interviewee: Harrison Chege, Kelly Brown and Anastasia Mbala

9. Title: Cape Town, South Africa – urban farming on the rise to boost people's food security

https://cdkn.org/2020/12/feature-cape-town-south-africa-urban-farming-on-the-rise-to-boost-peoples-food-security/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

Interviewer: Sumetee Pahwa Gajjar

Interviewees: Beverly Nakani and Sandi Lewis

10. Title: Keta, Ghana – agribusiness offers women and youth greater food security during pandemic

https://cdkn.org/2020/12/feature-keta-ghana-agribusiness-offers-women-and-youth-greater-food-security-during-pandemic/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Keta, Ghana

Interviewer: Misper Apawu

Interviewee: Sedem Tetevi, Bliss Quashie and Senam

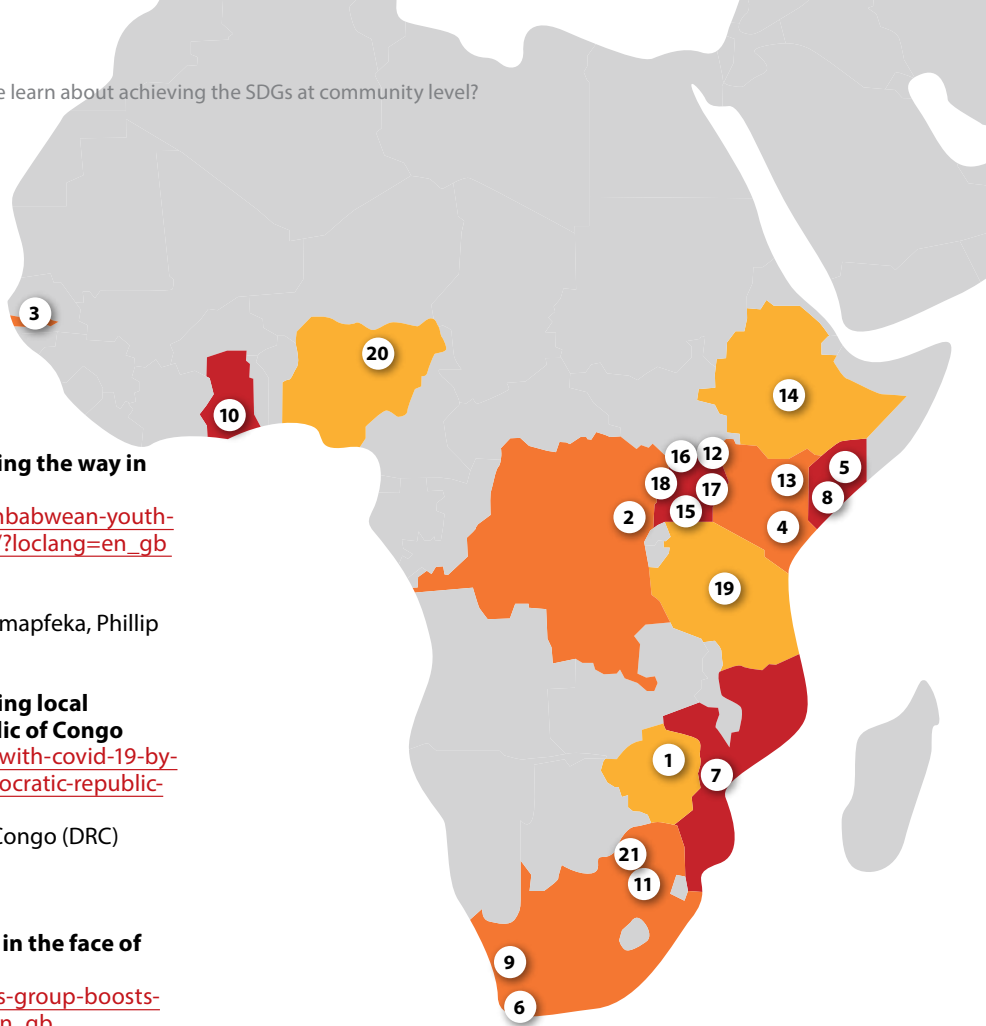
11. Title: Johannesburg, South Africa – Waste reclaimers join hands to save the city

https://cdkn.org/2021/02/feature-johannesburg-south-africa-waste-reclaimers-join-hands-to-save-the-city/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Johannesburg, South Africa

Interviewer: Shahrin Mannan

Interviewees: Eli Kodisang, Luyanda Hlatshwayo, Paula Vilakazi and Eva Mokoena



12. Title: Kabulasoke, Uganda – Harnessing opportunities for youth during the Covid-19 pandemic

https://cdkn.org/2021/02/feature-kabulasoke-uganda-harnessing-opportunities-for-youth-during-covid-19/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Kabulasoke, Uganda
Interviewer: Godliver Businge
Interviewee: Twehayo Naume

13. Title: Siaya, Kenya – the ‘Covid women’ making a difference

https://cdkn.org/2021/06/feature-siaya-kenya-the-covid-women-making-a-difference/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Siaya, Kenya
Interviewer: Rosemary Atieno
Interviewee: Isabella, Margaret and Beatrice

14. Title: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – A community alliance faces up to Covid-19 in Addis Ababa

https://cdkn.org/2021/03/feature-a-community-alliance-faces-up-to-covid-19/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Interviewer: Ephrem Tesema Antenh
Interviewee: Abebech Bekele

15. Title: Mbarara, Uganda – informal community uses collective savings to deal with Covid-19

https://cdkn.org/2021/04/feature-mbarara-uganda-informal-community-uses-collective-savings-to-deal-with-covid-19/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Mbarara, Uganda
Interviewer: Sarah Nandudu
Interviewee: Katongole Deus and Ibrahim

16. Title: Kampala, Uganda – Exploring alternative livelihood options to secure life

https://cdkn.org/2021/05/feature-kampala-uganda-exploring-alternative-livelihood-options-to-secure-life/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Kampala, Uganda
Interviewer: Sarah Nandudu
Interviewee: Mirembe Esther and Benon

17. Title: Maddu, Uganda – A story of service above self

https://cdkn.org/2021/08/feature-maddu-uganda-a-story-of-service-above-self/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Maddu, Uganda
Interviewer: Allen Lunkuse
Interviewee: Betty Zalwango and Sarah Namugga

18. Title: Kampala, Uganda: Resilience in the face of Covid-19 – A single mother’s story

https://cdkn.org/2021/09/feature-kampala-uganda-resilience-in-the-face-of-covid-19-a-single-mothers-story/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Kampala, Uganda
Interviewer: Sandra Coote
Interviewee: Namubiru Harriet Milly

19. Title: Iseke, Tanzania – young people boost economic opportunity in midst of Covid-19 pandemic

https://cdkn.org/2021/09/feature-iseke-tanzania-young-people-boost-economic-opportunity-in-midst-of-covid-19-pandemic/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Iseke, Tanzania
Interviewer: Jerry Danny, Charles Mnyororo, Emmanuel Hamis and Emmanuel Msumba
Interviewee: Maria Elisha

20. Title: Kwara, Nigeria – Young women lead the fight for greener and stronger communities during Covid-19

https://cdkn.org/2021/09/feature-kwara-nigeria-young-women-lead-the-fight-for-greener-and-stronger-communities-during-covid-19/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Kwara, Nigeria
Interviewer: Azeez Abubakar
Interviewee: Salmah Abdulrahman and Baliquees

21. Title: Solidarity Kliptown style – A resilience story from South Africa

https://cdkn.org/2021/10/feature-solidarity-kliptown-style-a-resilience-story-from-south-africa/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Kliptown, South Africa
Interviewer: Thabang Nkwanyana
Interviewee: Ginger Mahlamvu and Robert Mobasa

Asia

22. Title: Lockdown, slum style – an interview with Sheela Patel of Slum Dwellers International

https://cdkn.org/2020/06/video-lock-down-slum-style-an-interview-with-sheela-patel-of-slum-dwellers-international/?loclang=en_gb

Location: India
Interviewee: Sheela Patel

23. Title: Bangladeshi farmers respond to COVID-19 with innovation

https://cdkn.org/2020/06/feature-bangladeshi-farmers-respond-to-covid-19-with-innovation/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Bangladesh
Interviewer: Zakir Hossain
Interviewee: Delowar Jahan

24. Title: Rafiq Nagar, Mumbai – Residents confront COVID-19 on top of existing health threats

https://cdkn.org/2020/07/feature-rafiq-nagar-mumbai-residents-confront-covid-19-on-top-of-existing-health-threats/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Mumbai, India
Interviewee: Shamimbanu Salim Sheikh

25. Title: Dhaka, Bangladesh – How one woman’s idea unleashed community spirit

https://cdkn.org/2020/07/feature-dhaka-bangladesh-how-one-womans-idea-unleashed-community-spirit/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Dhaka, Bangladesh
Interviewer: Maheen Khan
Interviewee: Sheuly Ishrat

26. Title: Kathmandu, Nepal – Young people lead innovative initiatives during COVID-19 pandemic

https://cdkn.org/2020/08/feature-kathmandu-nepal-young-people-lead-innovative-initiatives-during-covid-19-pandemic/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Kathmandu, Nepal
Interviewer: Krishna Bahadur Khadka and Rubina Adhikari
Interviewee: Nabin Bikash Maharjan, Sajal Pradhan, Prashanna Chudal Sharma and Zachary Barton

27. Title: In Indian cities, women community leaders aid migrants during pandemic

https://cdkn.org/2020/08/feature-indian-community-leaders-aid-migrants-during-pandemic/?loclang=en_gb

Location: India
Interviewer: Roshini Suparna Diwakar and Konica Udhani
Interviewee: Sarita Varnaval, Radhika Pandey and Mumtaz



28. Title: Community savings groups play crucial role in Bangladesh during COVID-19 crisis

https://cdkn.org/2020/08/community-savings-groups-play-crucial-role-during-covid-19-crisis/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Bangladesh
Interviewer: Saeqah Kabir
Interviewee: Moyna and Hanifa

29. Title: Kunni Kharka, Nepal: The plight of Dalit communities during an unprecedented crisis

https://cdkn.org/2020/09/feature-kunni-kharka-nepal-the-plight-of-dalit-communities-during-an-unprecedented-crisis/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Kunni Kharka, Nepal
Interviewer: Naresh Kumar Shreshtha
Interviewee: Bishnu Maya Nepali

30. Title: Satkhira, Bangladesh: Multiple initiatives by a female-led organisation to tackle COVID, extreme events

https://cdkn.org/2020/09/feature-satkhira-bangladesh-multiple-initiatives-by-a-female-led-organisation/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Satkhira, Bangladesh
Interviewer: Sohanur Rahman
Interviewee: Jannatul Mawa

31. Title: Satkhira, Bangladesh – Young people demonstrate initiative during crises

https://cdkn.org/2020/10/satkhira-bangladesh-young-people-demonstrate-initiative-during-crisis/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Satkhira, Bangladesh
Interviewer: Sohanur Rahman
Interviewee: SM Shahin Alom

32. Title: Dharavi, India – Local women help where government agencies will not, in country's largest slum

https://cdkn.org/2020/10/feature-dharavi-india-local-women-help-where-government-agencies-will-not-in-countrys-largest-slum/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Dharavi, India
Interviewer: Shweta Sundar and Bharat Gangurde
Interviewee: Vidya Balkrishna Mane and Harshada Ganesh Doiphode

33. Title: Nepal – Managing misinformation during COVID-19

https://cdkn.org/2020/10/feature-nepal-managing-misinformation-during-covid-19/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Nepal
Interviewer: Suresh Chandis and Bikin Ghimire

34. Title: Bangladesh – Radical change needed to ensure justice for hijra communities

https://cdkn.org/2020/11/feature-bangladesh-radical-change-needed-to-ensure-justice-for-hijra-communities/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Bangladesh
Interviewer: Maheen Khan
Interviewees: Joya Sikder

35. Title: Guwahati, India – How informal settlers are building resilience in the face of compounding shocks

https://cdkn.org/2020/11/feature-guwahati-india-how-informal-settlers-are-building-resilience-in-the-face-of-compounding-shocks/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Guwahati, India
Interviewer: Syeda Mehzebin Rahman and Minakhi Tamuli
Interviewee: Bindu Singh, Arvind and Deepak

36. Title: Kathmandu, Nepal – The plight of construction workers during the global pandemic

https://cdkn.org/2020/12/feature-kathmandu-nepal-the-plight-of-construction-workers-during-the-global-pandemic/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Kathmandu, Nepal
Interviewer: Krishna Bahadur Khadka and Rubina Adhikari
Interviewee: Pramila Shrestha, Krishna Sharma, Om Bhujel and Ramesh Chaudhary

37. Title: Caloco, Philippines – Fisher folks are braving complex crises

https://cdkn.org/2021/01/feature-caloco-philippines-fisher-folks-are-braving-complex-crisis/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Caloco, Philippines
Interviewer: Rhaydz Barcia
Interviewee: Robinson Ben Callao

38. Title: Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh – Women’s group and local government join forces to protect lives
https://cdkn.org/2021/01/feature-coxs-bazar-bangladesh-womens-group-and-local-government-join-forces-to-protect-lives/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Bangladesh
 Interviewer: Md Fahad Hossain
 Interviewee: Janntul Bokeya Rekha

39. Title: Pune, India – Community leaders form multiple partnerships to tackle COVID-19, build resilience
https://cdkn.org/2021/02/feature-pune-india-community-leaders-form-multiple-partnerships-to-tackle-covid-19-build-resilience/?loclang=en_gb&fbclid=IwAR24w6KLxApikC_MTOMe9aNE9qOW-jBiUdopQObzbuRnA3DW-zK6Y1-BjZA

Location: Pune, India
 Interviewer: Isha Joshi
 Interviewee: Balu Dandekar, Ganesh Zombawade and Sunita Salunke

40. Title: Yogyakarta, Indonesia – Civil society groups forge solidarity for resilience
https://cdkn.org/2021/02/feature-yogyakarta-indonesia-civil-society-groups-forge-solidarity-for-resilience/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Yogyakarta, Indonesia
 Interviewer: Annisa Hadny
 Interviewee: Atik Rochayati

41. Title: Kurigram, Bangladesh – Rural women together tackling multiple crises
https://cdkn.org/2021/03/feature-kurigram-bangladesh-rural-women-together-tackling-multiple-crises/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Kurigram, Bangladesh
 Interviewer: Md Fahad Hossain
 Interviewee: Farida Easmin

42. Title: Korail, Bangladesh - The potential of urban agriculture as a survival tool for informal communities
https://cdkn.org/2021/04/feature-korail-bangladesh-the-potential-of-urban-agriculture-as-a-survival-tool-for-informal-communities/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Korail, Bangladesh
 Interviewers: Dipak Bhowmick and Nusrat Bijoya
 Interviewees: Bokuli Begum, Sakhina Khatun, Mst. Ohida, Nazma Begum, and Selina

43. Title: Uttar Pradesh, India – Community owned solutions strengthen rural resilience
https://cdkn.org/2021/04/feature-uttar-pradesh-india-community-owned-solutions/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Uttar Pradesh, India
 Interviewer: Neelmani Gupta
 Interviewee: Phula Devi, Rakesh Pandey and Reshma

Pacific

44. Title: Fiji – Community voices highlight lessons and opportunities for resilience
https://cdkn.org/2020/06/feature-fiji-community-voices-highlight-lessons-and-opportunities-for-resilience/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Fiji
 Interviewer: Jioje Fesaitu
 Interviewee: Saleshni Wati

45. Title: Solomon Islands – How the Barana Community is preparing for COVID-19
https://cdkn.org/2020/07/feature-solomon-islands-how-the-barana-community-is-preparing-for-covid-19/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Solomon Islands
 Interviewer: John Walenenea Jr
 Interviewee: Peter Tabiru, Benjamin Dadai, Jerry Mane and Melinda Kii

Latin America

46. Title: Colombia – How waste pickers have fought for their rights and cleaned cities during COVID-19
https://cdkn.org/2020/11/feature-colombia-how-waste-pickers-have-fought-for-their-rights-and-cleaned-cities-during-covid-19/?loclang=en_gb

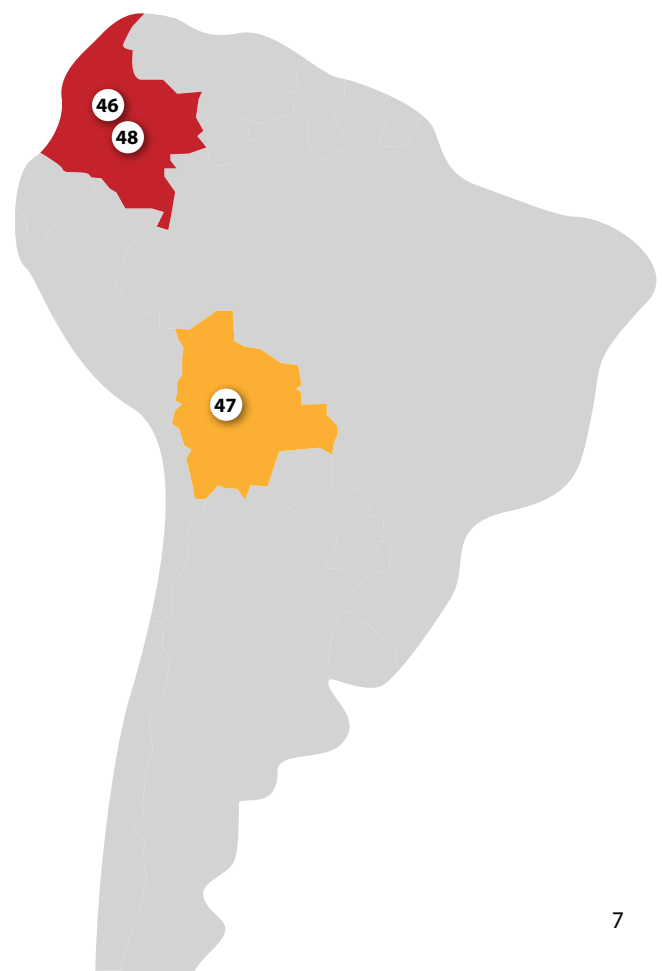
Location: Colombia
 Interviewer: Federico Parra
 Interviewee: Marta Elena Iglesias, Maryuri Cordoba and Nohra Padilla

47. Title: Cochabamba, Bolivia – Combination of community savings and formal banking reduce women’s hardships
https://cdkn.org/2021/03/feature-cochabamba-bolivia-combination-of-community-savings-and-formal-banking-reduce-womens-hardships/?loclang=en_gb

Location: Cochabamba, Bolivia
 Interviewer: María Eugenia Torrico Ferrufino
 Interviewee: Emiliana Mamani Vale

48. Title: El Alto Fucha, Colombia – Community gardens for food security during pandemic
https://cdkn.org/2021/04/feature-el-alto-fucha-colombia-community-gardens/?loclang=en_gb

Location: El Alto Fucha, Colombia
 Interviewer: María Eugenia Torrico Ferrufino
 Interviewee: Jhody Katherine Sánchez Beltrán





No poverty (SDG1)

*End poverty in all its forms everywhere*⁸

Challenges to ending poverty – the global picture

- Covid-19 has caused the [first increase in global poverty in decades](#).⁹
- Covid-19 could add as many as 88-115 million more people to the ranks of the extreme poor by 2021 – pushing back progress by three years ([World Bank](#)).¹⁰

Challenges to ending poverty – local community perspectives

People whose lives were economically precarious were easily overturned by the turbulence of the Covid-19 pandemic and governments' measures to address it. In India, for example there are 42 million internal migrants. An astonishing percentage of major cities comprises migrants (Ahmedabad: [46 percent](#);¹¹ Surat: 64.6 percent; Delhi [42 percent](#))¹² and they consequently make up over [50 percent](#)¹³ of the cities' workforce. However, when the Government of India declared a national lockdown in March 2020, migrant labourers, who depend upon daily casual jobs, [suddenly found themselves jobless overnight](#).¹⁴



Women in India extend support to migrant communities during the pandemic.
© Mahila Housing Trust

Grassroots solutions for ending poverty

Stop-gap measures. The Voices from the Frontline stories document very extensive efforts by community members to help each other to simply survive. The typical story involves individuals with relatively more regular, secure wages and/or some savings accumulated who are helping those who are more economically vulnerable, such as those who lost insecure jobs or livelihoods overnight and have no savings at all. Often this may be characterised as lower-income people helping those in abject poverty to 'get by', at least as a stop-gap measure.

The Mahila Housing Trust in India, for instance, was already in existence before the pandemic and had formed Community Action Groups of 12-25 women to help the most vulnerable. When the lockdown happened, they identified that migrant labourers were among the most economically and socially vulnerable groups, and they distributed ration packages to them. Some women even used their own wages to buy food, drink and sanitary supplies directly for the migrant labourers.

Local knowledge and documentation. One of the strongest contributions of community groups is their local knowledge and ability to document who is in need and appropriate solutions. For example, the women's Community Action Groups in India – hearing that some migrant labourers missed receiving official relief packages – compiled a database of especially vulnerable community members and [tracked that they were able to receive basic supplies](#).¹⁵

In Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Bureau of Information, Training, Exchanges, and Research for Development (BIFERD) carried out a Knowledge Practices and Attitude Survey to gauge local people's understanding of the new public health threat and establish how they were coping. The survey revealed that less than 50 percent of the people living in Goma had access to clean water

and some 98 percent of households did not have sufficient food when the government imposed a total lockdown. Their data [guided BIFERD to mobilise 250 volunteers](#)¹⁶ to “create awareness about the virus, initiate income-generating activities for women and provide small loans in order to support the most impacted communities.”

Advocacy capacity and the ability to mobilise broader resources. Almost universally we hear that community groups are taking short-term measures to help those in destitution. Activists recognise the urgent need for government or other actors to step in with longer term solutions.

The Indian Community Action Groups [coordinated with local government](#)¹⁷ to identify the most vulnerable people and extend survival rations - but they also made sure to “participate in local governance by creating awareness, coordinating with government officials, and partnering with various stakeholders to ensure service delivery.”

In the slum of Rafiq Nagar in Mumbai, India, [community women lobbied their Member of the Legislative Assembly](#)¹⁸ to provide them with money for cooking supplies, so the women could cook meals for the hungry.

The Voices from the Frontline stories provide snapshots in time of how communities were coping with Covid-19 and other risks, rather than longitudinal perspectives. Thus, the stories do not systematically track communities’ progress over time. However, the stories indicate that community groups’ advocacy strategies were succeeding, even in the early days of the pandemic, in mobilising resources from external actors and deploying them where they were needed. For example, the Community Action Groups in India of 12-25 women liaised with government offices to extend free bus and train tickets to help stranded migrant workers to get home.

Many Covid-19-related interventions undertaken by community organisations and NGOs, as well as individuals were in the form of “grants, internal cash resources, cash donations and in-kind contributions from civil society and organs of government, such as donations of food and food ingredients, cleaning supplies and protective equipment (masks) etc. In



Mumbai slums, India, where Covid-19 adds to existing public health issues already faced by its residents. © liquidcrash

Enabling actions to support and work with community solutions

- Community organisations have access to some of the highest quality and most up-to-date information on who is in a local area and what their needs are. Governments and development partners must support and work with the custodians of this valuable information and local knowledge.
- Both formal and informal community responses to Covid-19 have been made possible by the trust established among individuals at the local level. This suggests that government and development partners should invest in community organising – which builds ‘social capital’ – on an ongoing basis.
- It is important to build the capacity of local actors to advocate for their rights and for improvements in development services from external actors.

some instances, distinct and limited Covid-19-related contributions were provided by international partner organisations or affiliated organisations or individuals with existing relationships with local individuals and/or community-based organisations” (Ebrahim for CDKN, forthcoming 2021).



Zero hunger (SDG2)

*End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*¹⁹

Challenges to food security – the global picture

- Food insecurity was already on the rise before the pandemic, increasing from 23.2% of the world's people in 2014 to 26.4% in 2018; and a lack of adequate nutrition was already a pervasive problem, causing stunting of children's growth ([United Nations, 2021](#)).²⁰
- The pandemic made this worse. World Food Programme has found that the cost of a basket of basic foodstuffs increased by 10% during the pandemic ([WFP, 2021](#)).²¹

Challenges to food security – local community perspectives

With the widespread loss of jobs due to the economic repercussions of Covid-19, food security has become an acute problem for individuals, families and communities. Loss of income leaves people without enough food to eat, while lockdowns to prevent the spread of coronavirus have, in some cases, barred people's access to fields and pastures to produce food. Among the many Voices from the Frontline stories echoing this theme are those from an informal settlement in Colombia, a rural community in Kenya and peri-urban communities in South Africa.

In El Alto Fucha, an informal settlement in Bogota, Colombia, Jhody Katherine Sánchez Beltrán described how, when the country went into lockdown, "neither the national or local government guaranteed food and free public services... If people cannot access a job," she asked, "then what can they live on?" Particularly hard-hit were informal workers without regular waged employment, among whom there was a '[great shortage](#)' of food.²² While conducting a Covid hygiene campaign in the settlement, Ms Sánchez Beltrán saw that people were 'starving'.

It was a similar story in [Siaya, Kenya, on the shores of Lake Victoria](#).²³ Linnet Obonyo, a community health

worker, observed: "Families soon ran out of food as people were losing jobs due to the pandemic." In [Cape Town, South Africa](#),²⁴ the Covid-19 pandemic "triggered higher levels of indigence among the most impoverished and historically disadvantaged communities," reported Sumetee Pahwa Gajjar of PlanAdapt. "In many cities, such as Cape Town, and their larger metropolitan regions, communities living in informal settlements have faced acute food shortages – all the more so because of large numbers of immigrants from the rural areas."

In urban India, day labourers found themselves suddenly without paid work due to Covid-related lockdowns. Already living a hand-to-mouth existence, no wages meant no food.

Grassroots solutions for achieving food security

Kitchen gardens. Fast work to ramp up production of urban agriculture, including so-called 'kitchen gardens', has been a strong theme of the Voices from the Frontline stories. Either existing groups have increased capacity or expanded their plots, as in El Alto Fucha, Colombia; or groups have initiated new efforts, as in Kenya.

In Colombia, the Huertopia Collective run by Ms Sánchez Beltrán was already organised and had knowledge of seeds and varieties that would prosper. "Our community had the capacity to sow for urban agriculture. Moreover, we also work in a network, so the groups are already organised," Ms Sánchez Beltrán explained. Huertopia Collective organised settlers living near each other to farm community gardens and family gardens in vacant plots together. On a case-by-case basis, the groups of households adopted lands, organised 'seed exchanges' and shared materials to enable them to work on gardens.

Although communities often have sound knowledge of which crops and varieties to grow locally to meet immediate food needs, and they may have access to seeds and equipment, they may need additional supplies of gardening / farming equipment and

“Like many women in her village, Linnet Obonyo has always played a lead role in times of crisis. Faced with this new threat, she quickly put her wealth of experience toward a new purpose and started working with women in local churches and through her NGO. Seeing the yield from her vegetable garden, she decided to **train the women on kitchen** gardening as a way of combating loss of food and household income amid the pandemic.”²⁶



In Siaya County, Kenya, Linnet Obonyo has taken up vegetable farming to combat Covid-19 induced food insecurity. © Rosemary Atieno

security equipment like fences, etc. to **protect crops and boost production.**²⁵

Community grain banks. Since 2011, **Shramik Bharti**,²⁷ a local NGO in Uttar Pradesh has enabled rural disadvantaged communities to set up ‘Community Grain Banks’ to ensure their food security throughout the year. This simple yet effective solution is one that local people can easily manage and sustain: they take grain to feed their families when they are hungry; they repay it when they harvest. Today, there are more than 200 community grain banks that ensure the food security of more than 6,000 small and marginal farming families and agriculture labourers in six districts of Uttar Pradesh, India, assisting more than 30,000 people.

Community measures to create sustained income from selling agricultural produce are described in the section below on SDG8: decent work.

“I am managing a community grain bank named Tulsi Samudayik Anaj Bank that was promoted by [local NGO] Shramik Bharti.... It comprises 51 women members from 51 small and marginal farming families who initially contributed 2 kgs of wheat towards setting up a community grain bank in our community. Shramik Bharti further provided support of 400 kgs of wheat and a storage bin of 5 quintal capacity. A member can borrow up to 100 kgs of wheat or whatever grain is stored from the grain bank. At the time of harvesting, the borrowers of grain will return the grain to their grain bank after adding 25% to it.”

Phula Devi, community grain bank manager, Siyarha village, Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh, India

Enabling actions to support and work with community solutions

- ➔ Train local people in cultivation methods and use of appropriate cultivars for producing food in vacant lots and under-used lands.
- ➔ Assess which agricultural inputs are beyond the economic means of households and local communities (e.g. seeds, equipment) and could be provided to augment their efforts and help them to help themselves.
- ➔ Work with community members to assess whether a community grain bank scheme would benefit them.



Women in Uttar Pradesh, India, use community grain bank services to grow their own vegetables and ensure food security during Covid-19. © Shramik Bharti



Good health and wellbeing (SDG3)

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages²⁸

Challenges to healthy lives – the global picture

- “Covid-19 is the 21st century’s Chernobyl moment – not because a disease outbreak is like a nuclear accident, but because it has shown so clearly the gravity of the threat to our health and well-being. It has caused a crisis so deep and wide that presidents, prime ministers and heads of international and regional bodies must now urgently accept their responsibility to transform the way in which the world prepares for and responds to global health threats.” ([The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness & Response](#))²⁹
- A report in May 2021 found that the pandemic, at that time, was still killing more than 10,000 people every day; and at that date, fewer than one in 100 people in low-income countries had received a first dose. ([The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness & Response](#))³⁰

Challenges to healthy lives – local community perspectives

In many low income and marginalised communities, healthcare services were poor even before the Covid-19 pandemic, leaving people exposed and vulnerable to its effects.

In the [Maasai area of Kenya](#),³¹ for instance, Rose Wamalwa of Women Climate Centres International described the community’s pre-pandemic health facilities as “obsolete and dysfunctional. Stocks of medicines are insufficient, and the overall health infrastructure is in a ‘despicable condition.’”

In [Rafiq Nagar, an informal settlement of Mumbai, India](#),³² “Nobody outside the community, whether it’s the police, doctors or [city government] officers, dares

to come inside this area,” reported Shamimbanu Salim Sheikh. “They are scared that they will get infected and diagnosed with various diseases if they enter this slum” because it is an area that is used a dumping ground. As a result, no official ventured in to educate the residents about Covid-19 and how to avoid it.

Once the Covid-19 virus started spreading, communities faced:

- A lack of information and understanding about how Covid -19 spreads and how to contain it.
- A lack of access to hygiene equipment.
- A lack of access to standard healthcare services due to competition for resources to fight the pandemic (and under-provision of health services to start with).

Grassroots solutions for healthy lives

Voluntary health education and distribution of hygiene supplies. Women’s groups and youth groups have played leading roles as volunteers to educate their communities on hygiene protocols. The first challenge has been lack of information or disinterest in public health information.

For example, in the Masaai area of Kenya, where community members have “[focused on educating each other on hygiene measures](#)”³³ they “quickly realised that they have to take their own initiatives to protect themselves from the virus,” Rose Wamalwa recalled.

Meanwhile, in Siaya, Kenya, a group of women were crestfallen to see the lack of interest in hygiene protocols in their broader community. “As the pandemic continued to ravage in the country, the rural communities, especially along the shores of Lake Victoria continued behaving as normal. They wore face masks on the chin and did not keep social distance and



Rosa Orguba raises awareness of Covid-19 and counters misinformation in communities living in Isiolo County, Kenya. © Feiyah Action Network

proper hygiene. This bothered the team because they were of one accord to help their communities,” says [Isabella \[no last name given\] of Siaya](#).³⁴ Seeing people’s indifference, this group of women decided to take it upon themselves to educate the community, especially the elderly and other vulnerable groups such as disabled people. As community health workers, they went from door to door and held courtyard meetings, maintaining all hygiene protocols and describing how to wear masks, wash hands properly and maintain social distance.

In Hatcliffe Settlement in Harare, Zimbabwe – an informal settlement – [young people in the community asked relevant government ministries for further training](#)³⁵ so they could disseminate public health information more accurately. “We are requesting outreach programmes on Covid-19 issues, as we don’t have enough information. If the virus spreads in this community, we will struggle to survive because we are not practising social distancing. More youth can be engaged to disseminate vital information,” says Phillip Matamande, a member of the community.

Women’s health and menstrual hygiene was also of concern to communities and formed the focus for consolidated local efforts. For instance, [a women’s group in Satkhira, Bangladesh](#)³⁶ responded to women’s and girls’ need for menstrual hygiene products by making their own sanitary napkins and distributing them at little or no cost in the communities.

Countering misinformation. Countering actual misinformation that is harmful to personal and public health has been the second challenge. In the drylands of Kenya, rumours were rife that “because Africans are strong and live in warmer climates, they will not be infected by Covid-19,” said [Rose Ngoilelo Orguba of FEIYAH Action Network \(FAN\)](#)³⁷ – a community-based organisation that works on women and girls’ rights

in pastoralist Rendille and Samburu, Kenya. Some of the more outrageous rumours included that Covid-19 is a disease only suffered in cities or that the cure is a locally-brewed whisky. FAN [used a radio station to counter this misinformation in the communities](#).³⁸ “We have used case studies from other parts of the world to tackle the widespread rumours,” Ms Orguba explained. Apart from case studies, indigenous songs sung by women, which are shared on WhatsApp, have also been helpful to abate these rumours.

Meanwhile, in Nepal, an NGO run by young people called Accountability Lab Nepal realised that [‘fake news’ about Covid-19 was becoming rife](#),³⁹ following the disease’s outbreak. They were battling rumours, such as the one that drinking turmeric water and washing hands in warm water would cure people of the virus. Furthermore, Accountability Lab’s members became concerned that pregnant women were not receiving adequate care due to the pandemic. Fortunately, the organisation already had valuable experience and networks in place – as they had faced the challenge of fake news before. “Five years ago, Nepal was rocked by [a series of massive earthquakes that killed nearly 9,000 people](#),⁴⁰ reported [Suresh Chandis and Bikin Ghimire for Voices from the Frontline](#):⁴¹ “As dangerous as the earthquakes themselves were, the misinformation that followed created even more havoc. At that time, Accountability Lab mobilised its huge network of volunteers across the affected districts to track rumours, concerns, and feedback from the community members and it spread accurate, validated information in communities to tackle the myths. This experience helped the Lab leverage its past learnings to deal with misinformation during the ongoing pandemic.”

Enabling actions to support and work with community solutions

- ➔ Brief community groups, including youth and women’s groups, who are eager to volunteer as community educators, with sound scientific/public health information so they can spread the word effectively.
- ➔ Launch communications campaigns across multiple media platforms, including radio and social media, and in everyday language.



Gender equality (SDG5)

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls⁴²

Challenges to the empowerment of women and girls – the global picture

- Lockdowns are increasing the risk of violence against women and girls, of a physical, sexual and psychological nature. Cases of domestic violence have increased by 30% in some countries ([United Nations, 2021](#)).⁴³
- The intensification of violence against women and girls is being dubbed the ‘Shadow Pandemic’ by the United Nations ([UN Women, 2021](#)).⁴⁴
- “Stress, the disruption of social and protective networks, loss of income and decreased access to services all can exacerbate the risk of violence for women. In addition, access to sexual and reproductive health services will likely become more limited. Other services, such as hotlines, crisis centres, shelters, legal aid, and protection services may also be reduced, making it difficult for women to access the few sources of help that would usually be available.” ([World Health Organization, n.d.](#))⁴⁵
- Women already spend about three times as many hours on unpaid domestic and care work as men ([UN Women, 2021](#))⁴⁶ but this has increased substantially during the pandemic.



In Maddu, Uganda, two women extend education services during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure a bright future for the children.
© Allen Lunkuse

Challenges to the empowerment of women and girls – local community perspectives

Many individual women in communities and organised women’s groups report that discrimination against women and girls is nothing new and a scourge to be tackled at the best of times. However, conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic have exacerbated the problem.

“With a “reasonable” number of heads of cattle, most parents in this community would not think twice about getting their daughter out of school and marrying them off to the next stranger.”

Betty Zalwango, Maddu, Uganda⁴⁷

Their anecdotal reports mirror official reports that domestic violence is on the rise during the pandemic. Family members have lost jobs and income is scarce, causing greater frustration, which is channelled into domestic violence. One reason that violence against girl children has increased is because schools are closed and they are staying at home ([Maddu, Uganda, 2021](#)).⁴⁸

Violence against girl children in the form of early marriages has also risen during the pandemic period. This is happening in some contexts where families receive dowry payments for the marriage of their daughters. When parents lose jobs and face economic hardship during the pandemic, they look to their daughters’ early marriage as a source of cash and assets. Some of these girls are early teens, well below the age of consent, and early marriage is a breach of their human rights.

Gender-based violence affecting women of all ages is pervasive across countries and societies. In the [Mount Elgon region of western Kenya](#),⁴⁹ women community leaders Diana Noormishuki Chesengei and Evelin Namalwa have spearheaded public information campaigns to inform community members about



In Kenya, indigenous women are faced with multiple challenges given their remote locations, traditional customs and patriarchal values. Evelin Namalwa, a community health volunteer, has been acting as a communication link between healthcare workers and households during the pandemic.
© Women Climate Centers International

how to combat Covid-19. However, as interviewer Rose Wamalwa explains, “Their initiatives have not been without obstacles. In indigenous communities in Kenya, women are considered inferior to men and have to abide by the directives given by their husbands. In the past, Mama Evelin had even been abducted and almost killed because of her work on women’s empowerment. Currently, she coordinates a group of 50 women who are working to create pandemic-related awareness. A majority of these women are victims of physical abuse and rape.”

In Isiolo county, Kenya, women’s groups believe that lockdowns and increased police powers have created conditions where gender-based violence and sexual harassment can more easily occur. “The curfew hours provided security officers with an opportunity to ask for money as bribes and sexual favours from women in exchange for not arresting them and taking them to the court,” [says Grace Lolim of Isiolo Gender Watch](#).⁵⁰

Gender-based violence affects not only girls and women who were designated female at birth; it also affects transgender and intersex people, such as the [hijra \(transgender\) community of Bangladesh](#).⁵¹ Hijra people are recognised as a third gender under Bangladeshi law but face widespread discrimination nonetheless. The Covid-19 pandemic has made things worse, though. “Shops and homes denied to help them as they were perceived as unclean and obvious virus carriers,” [reports Joya Sikder, a hijra activist](#).⁵²

Grassroots solutions for achieving empowerment of women and girls

Girls

Interventions to address the specific risks to girls include:

- Keeping girls in education, even if it is a makeshift arrangement;
- Addressing boys’ and guardians’ attitudes to girls’ rights.

Schooling. In Uganda, schools have been closed due to the pandemic. In Maddu, a rural dryland county, Betty Zalwango is a young, aspiring teacher with school-age siblings at home, who were losing interest in learning. Ms Zalwango decided to home-school her siblings to motivate their interest in learning again. She then opened her house and welcomed friends’ and neighbours’ children to the informal classroom. She was permitted to borrow textbooks and materials from the primary school, to teach a small group of children.

Ms Zalwango’s model has been adopted by a new NGO in the area, which has engaged teachers, formed learning groups of 20 students per teacher, and provided textbooks. The teachers are given a stipend by the NGO. These activities have played an important



In Kenya, indigenous women are tapping into local resources, and undertaking individual and collective initiatives to tackle the Covid-19 crisis.
© Women Climate Centers International

role in keeping girls in school and less vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual coercion.

Ms Zulwango has kept local youngsters' hopes alive for gaining an education, [says Allen Lunkuse, a community development worker](#).⁵³ That said, this community-based model is not the ideal long-term solution: a true solution would be achieved through adequate government resourcing for vaccination in the community and the Covid-safe reopening of schools.

Attitudes. Interventions may be required 'on the spot' to prevent breaches of girls' rights. These spot interventions can accompany longer-term educational efforts. Sarah Namugga is a [Community-based Civic Educator and Monitor with ACTADE in Maddu, Uganda](#).⁵⁴ She found herself intervening in a family's attempt to marry their 15-year-old daughter to a 17-year-old boy for dowry. She was successful in preventing the marriage and the children's parents were penalised and both families counselled.

In another case, Ms Namugga reports that "a father had refused to take his daughter back to school after the first [Covid-19] wave and lockdown, claiming she was overgrown, despite her desire to continue with school." She persuaded the father that it was his daughter's right to continue her education, and the girl re-enrolled subsequently, on a vocational course.

This story demonstrates the ongoing need for engagement and awareness-raising in communities around girls' rights. Trained and dedicated social

workers like Ms Namugga are needed to pursue such work consistently. The work is "limited by inadequate financial support,...[and] high illiteracy levels in the community also made people easily led by misinformation," [observes Allen Lunkuse](#).⁵⁵

Communications campaigns. [In Isiolo county, Kenya](#),⁵⁶ Grace Lolim and Isiolo Gender Watch have instigated radio talk shows to discuss the importance of Covid hygiene measures, such as social distancing, wearing masks and washing hands. They also perceived that the introduction of Covid-related lockdowns was putting girls more at risk of abuse – and they are using public communications channels to campaign against this: "On 13 August 2020, a young girl was sexually abused and taken hostage by the police. Isiolo Gender Watch shared this information on social media, which immediately gained attention from the local authorities. The girl was taken back to her home and the police officer was arrested," Ms Lolim explains. "The talk show enables two-way knowledge sharing and helps to address the issues of violence. Communities are now able to hold authorities accountable for anti-social activities during the lockdown."

Women

For women beyond adolescence, issues around domestic violence still figure (as above), and women are actively challenging gender discrimination in public decision-making, too.



Individuals from the Hijra community in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The community has faced increased victimisation, exclusion and economic hardship during the Covid-19 pandemic. © Somporker Noya Setu

Using Covid responses to leverage women’s empowerment. Some women tell how they are using the extraordinary circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic as leverage to push for more public-facing roles for themselves and other women. Ms Chesengei and Ms Namalwa of the Mount Elgon, Kenya, area have decided to come out fighting against gender-based discrimination and to confront taboos about women’s roles, as they rise to the challenge of the pandemic.

“Every day I arm myself with a face mask and take all hygienic precautions to visit community households and share information and knowledge about the virus. I am now known as, ‘Mama Corona’ and am very proud of this title, because it recognises my work during a global pandemic,” [explains Ms Namalwa](#).⁵⁷

Transgender people

Fundraising from private supporters.

Transgender people who face increased ostracisation under the pandemic, and hence poorer access to healthcare and income, have had few places left to turn. Hope and help have come in the form of an international, privately-funded GoFundMe campaign [organised by a transgender rights NGO](#).⁵⁸

The fundraiser garnered the support of academics and private citizens in Dhaka and worldwide. This initiative enabled the organisation, *Somporker Noya Setu* (Bridging New Relationships), to distribute survival funds to 650 hijra people in the space of

three months alone – and the work continues. The NGO has also maintained its promotional campaigns to engender dignity and respect for hijra people so that they may more readily access medical support when they need it.

Enabling actions to support and work with community solutions

- Engage with and support existing women’s rights and transgender rights groups.
- Train and deploy social workers and/or community activists to raise awareness of girls’, women’s and transgender people’s rights within and across entire communities.
- Prioritise the provision of formal schooling during the pandemic, recognising the dual educational and safeguarding roles of schools in protecting girls and advancing their development.
- As a stop-gap measure, consider funding and providing materials to support informal schooling in the community – but this must be by vetted, responsible adults, to ensure children and adolescents are safeguarded.



Clean water and sanitation (SDG6)

*Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*⁵⁹

Challenges to clean water and sanitation – the global picture

- Billions of people still lack access to clean water and sanitation and, vitally, access to sanitation is key to stopping the spread of Covid-19.
- “Availability and access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services is fundamental to fighting the virus and preserving the health and wellbeing of millions” ([United Nations, March 2020](#)).⁶⁰

Challenges to clean water and sanitation – local community perspectives

The residents of informal settlements are especially vulnerable to health risks arising from lack of freshwater and sanitation. By definition, informal settlements are where public services are inadequately planned and provided.

In Mumbai, India, typical houses are only 200-400 square feet and most people rely on public toilets, according to [Sheela Patel of Slum Dwellers International](#).⁶¹ There was insufficient sanitation here before the pandemic – neither enough water, soap and cleaning supplies, nor electricity to keep the toilet blocks in functioning order, she reports. A recent decision by the municipality not to charge for the use of the toilet blocks left them without revenue for maintenance and “nobody has any answers,” Ms Patel said.

The Sustainable Development Goal for clean water and sanitation also covers solid waste and its appropriate management, stating: “By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimising release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and

safe reuse globally.” Several Voices from the Frontline told of how waste collection and management services were initially suspended as a result of Covid-related lockdowns, leading to deleterious amounts of solid waste clogging cities’ streets and waterways (at worse levels than previously). “By the time the lockdown was eased, the whole city and its streams and rivers were filled with garbage,” says [Eva Mokoena, the chairperson of African Reclaimers Organisation, Johannesburg, South Africa](#).⁶²

Grassroots solutions for achieving clean water and sanitation

Latrine construction. An effective route to meeting communities’ sanitation needs is suggested by an initiative in Uganda. Here, Women’s Climate Centres International (WCCI) runs a ‘one-stop centre’ that equips community members with construction skills including how to build and safely manage innovative sanitation technologies, such as ecological toilets, lined Ventilated Pit Latrines, and double leach toilets. A [story from Twehayo Naume of Kabulasoke](#)⁶³ in Gomba District, Central Uganda, tells how her training enabled her to meet vital community needs and provided the critical income her family desperately needed.

“Many people gave me work to construct improved toilets for them. I was overwhelmed with so many job opportunities but was struggling to meet the market demand individually.”

Twehayo Naume, Kabulasoke, Uganda

To meet the extensive demand, Ms Naume went on to train groups of young women and men from her county in latrine construction skills. She then worked to match supply and demand, by encouraging households to form clusters of ten and [pool their finances](#)⁶⁴ to purchase improved latrines. Village Health Team members guide the households to select



Twehayo Naume has trained other young people in Kabulasoke, Uganda, to provide their community with sanitation facilities that include functional hand washing provision. © Godliver Businge

appropriate sanitation designs and contact available trained masons to expedite construction.

Soaps, gels and hand hygiene. Among the Voices from the Frontline stories, it is evident that NGOs and networks of grassroots organisations are playing key roles in the provision of seed capital for local people to purchase the raw materials for production of soaps and hand gels, as well as skills training and sometimes the direct provision of raw materials.

In an informal settlement of Zimbabwe’s capital Harare, called Hatcliffe, the Safe and Inclusive Cities project [provided raw materials for soap-making](#)⁶⁵ to young entrepreneurs. This increased young people’s sales and savings, as well as boosting uptake of soap use at community water points.

In [Siaya, Kenya](#),⁶⁶ and [also in Kampala, Uganda](#),⁶⁷ women’s groups obtained soap-making supplies from NGOs and federations of grassroots groups, and then distributed the soap widely in their communities.

Freshwater points. Hundreds of millions of people around the world still lack access to reliable freshwater supplies, and the pandemic has only heightened

the need to address this challenge. Communities are highly motivated to improve supplies and have been raising their voices for improved levels of government services, especially to informal settlements. In Hatcliffe, the informal settlement in Zimbabwe, local youth leader [Steven Nyamapfeka arrives first thing in the morning](#)⁶⁸ to instruct residents to wash their hands before touching the borehole handle, and to sanitise the handle between uses. Residents of the area have asked the Ministry of Health to increase the supply of chlorinated water.

“My group has managed to distribute hand washing soaps near community boreholes to promote hygiene. We also influenced community leaders to regularly disinfect and monitor the water points to ensure safety. These public spaces have improved. Chaos is avoided as people adhere to protocols set by the leadership.”

*Lonica Kenneth, Hatcliffe settlement, Harare, Zimbabwe*⁶⁹

“As the team commenced their work, they received a donation from Women’s Climate Centers International (WCCI). They worked together, made more soap ready for distribution and bought a few 5-litre cans to make tippy taps. Later on, they distributed over 300 litres of soap with donations from well-wishers and distributed face masks and some food items to over 50 households.”

Rosemary Atieno, Community Mobilization for Positive Empowerment (COMPE)⁷⁰

Solid waste management. Organising a massive clean-up campaign to remove the solid waste littering streets and waterways in Johannesburg, South Africa has become a mission for the African Reclaimers Organisation. “We did the campaign for two reasons: first to clean up the city and environment and, second, to legitimise our existence to the city dwellers. Waste reclaimers have always been looked down upon and were never given the proper recognition, legality and respect by the citizens. We wanted to change that notion,” said director [Eva Mokoena](#).⁷¹ It will require additional resources, such as a large waste truck, to fulfil the group’s ambitions for the massive clean-up, but they are fundraising hard to meet their goals.

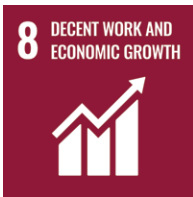
In Colombia, waste pickers there, too, are subject to social discrimination because of their livelihood. Like their South African counterparts, waste pickers were sent home at the outset of the pandemic and lost income – even as solid waste piled up and became a growing public health hazard. Here, waste pickers worked through their existing associations to lobby the government successfully to allow them to get back to work.

“Realising that staying at home wouldn’t be an effective survival strategy, a significant number of waste picker organisations, most of which are members of [National Association of Waste Pickers \(ANR\)](#),⁷² started organising themselves and advocating for recognition as essential service providers. It allowed them to have an organisational platform to have a common voice to call for clear rights, as well as a clear sectoral response to the new threat. Finally on 22 March 2020, the first national decree was issued

recognising their work as an essential service. The national government established the safety protocols that the organisations should follow. As a result, waste picker organisations that followed these protocols were able to move on the streets for limited hours, even during the lockdown. The recognition as public service providers and formal remuneration have bolstered the financial resilience and stability of waste pickers’ livelihoods in the face of Covid-19 and future uncertainties,” [reported Federico Parra](#).⁷³

Enabling actions to support and work with community solutions

- Redouble efforts to extend freshwater supplies for drinking and sanitation to communities that do not yet have reliable supplies, and assess and plan water supply and allocation in light of changing climatic patterns (e.g. supply to reservoirs, groundwater recharge, etc.).
- Train community groups in hygiene practices so that they can spread accurate information and effectively create more hygienic arrangements (e.g. for hand washing) in their communities.
- Provide small entrepreneurs and community groups with raw materials for production of hygiene materials such as soap and hand gels, which local people can then use for income generation while also promoting public health.
- Train individuals in construction techniques for safe, environmentally-friendly and locally appropriate latrines and sanitation infrastructure.
- Provide formal labour rights to waste pickers and formal negotiating rights to their labour unions/associations.
- Train waste pickers in Covid-safe hygiene protocols and protect the most clinically vulnerable of them (e.g. elderly) from exposure to potentially contaminated materials.



Decent work and economic growth (SDG8)

*Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*⁷⁴

Challenges to decent work and economic growth – the global picture

- The Covid-19 pandemic has “increased unemployment, underemployment and inactivity; losses in labour and business income, especially in the most impacted sectors; enterprise closures and bankruptcies, particularly for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises; supply chain disruptions; informality and insecurity of work and income; new challenges to health, safety and rights at work; and exacerbated poverty and economic and social inequality” ([ILO, Global Call to Action, July 2021](#)).⁷⁵
- Women and girls are hit harder as they are more likely to be in informal work, have no benefits, and hold positions as caregivers (United Nations).

Challenges to decent work and economic growth – local community perspectives

People have lost their jobs precipitously, due to the insecure nature of their work, as with the millions of migrant day labourers we documented in [India](#).⁷⁶

Others have been effectively cut off from their waged work by illness or by the necessity of caring for ill family members. And yet others have been cut off from their work by lockdowns and government restrictions on movement (as with fishers’ inability to set to sea in [the Philippines](#)⁷⁷ or vendors’ inability to access markets in [Indonesia](#)⁷⁸ and [Bangladesh](#)⁷⁹) or narrow categorisation of what constitutes ‘essential work’ and legally permitted to continue (as with waste pickers in [South Africa](#)⁸⁰ and [Colombia](#)⁸¹).

Grassroots solutions to create economic opportunity

The Voices from the Frontline stories showcase countless examples of local entrepreneurs turning adversity into opportunity by developing products to meet the demand for Covid-related products, such as hand gels, sanitisers and masks. As described in the chapter about sanitation (SDG6, above), this has often been facilitated by seed funds and supplies from intermediary organisations. It has spawned a new generation of micro and small businesses to produce the hygiene, sanitary products and services that are in increased demand during the pandemic.

Savings for start-ups. Community members have also made extensive use of savings groups, pooling their own funds to capitalise new business ventures during the pandemic. For instance, the Metro Focus Detergents Filming Group is under the Safe and Inclusive Cities project, a youth-led project funded by Plan International, and consists of 20 members. Saving is encouraged within the group, and the members have been practising saving 10 bond notes (approximately USD 0.10) per week. They also make and sell liquid soaps, detergents, liquid gas and different arts and crafts. “The Safe and Inclusive Cities project has been an eye opener, as I have been made aware of opportunities to generate income, and participate in my community. I have realised I can make detergents that will help my family and community,” shares [group member Lonica Kenneth](#).⁸²

In Keta, Ghana, [several friends came together to initiate a commercial farming business](#)⁸³ in the Volta region. Their goal is “to protect communities from starvation during Covid-19 and provide much-needed income,” according to Misper Apawu. Sedem Teteve, a semi-pro basketball player and civil engineer, banded together with friends and family to pool funds and purchase land for an arable farm. They subsequently engaged young people and women in commercial farming, from production to processing and supply chain management.

“SEDLA [the new company’s name] has brought farming into our community and created employment for young people. This initiative has helped us to have foodstuffs for our household and the community at large. By selling the food at a lower (than market) price for them, it has reduced our suffering.”

Bliss Quashie, a volunteer in the Keta, Ghana initiative.⁸⁴

Livelihood diversification. Others have diversified their existing small businesses into other products and services, either because they were forced by circumstance or they spotted new financial opportunities as a result of the pandemic. In the Philippines,⁸⁵ fishers were cut off from their usual livelihood of catching and selling high-value fish because of the lockdown, so they diverted into seaweed farming and carrageenan production, instead – a nearby and steady job, albeit less lucrative. Meanwhile, in Uganda,⁸⁶ Mirembe Esther and the members of the “Namungona Women Empowerment Initiative (NAWEI)” (named for the name of their informal settlement) have thrown themselves into briquette making as a means to grow their collective revenues “while waiting for government assistance” to arrive. In Nepal,⁸⁷ an agency specialising in climate smart agriculture used the opportunity of the business to explore how to explore how it could expand its training, research and development activities after the pandemic, to reach new markets.



Fishermen in Caloco, Philippines, started harvesting seaweed when they could not go fishing on the high seas during lockdown. © Rhaydz Barcia



Prakritik Krishi’s emergency fund enabled collaboration between farmers through the exchange of seeds, and provided fertilizers and basic food supply to farming communities in Bangladesh during the pandemic. © Prakritik Krishi

Keeping markets open. In Dhaka, Bangladesh,⁸⁸ the rapid spread of Covid-19 and a related lockdown broke the supply chains from farms to urban markets. This decision not only stopped the farmers’ income, making them worse off, but also affected food supplies in the city. One organisation’s answer was to liaise with the authorities to create a temporary, make-shift vegetable market near the village mosque to serve the local community. The idea was initially opposed by the local administration for fear of breaching social distancing protocols. But the farmers persisted with their efforts, and it was agreed that community police would be appointed to enforce and monitor social distance measures so that the market could operate.

Digital innovation. Facing the close-down of traditional markets in some places, micro and small entrepreneurs have turned to different digital platforms to innovate their marketing and distribution practices. In Yogyakarta, Indonesia,⁸⁹ businesswomen are using Whatsapp to identify customers for their produce. In Dhaka, Bangladesh and its surroundings,⁹⁰ young entrepreneurs have instigated new forms of internet-based ordering to maintain their groceries sales during the pandemic and meet communities’ food needs. Several youth-led companies in Nepal,⁹¹ including those offering training and human resource solutions, moved the bulk of their business online in response to lockdowns.

Enabling actions to support and work with community solutions

Barriers to financing at the community level

Economic/financial

- Lack of adequate collateral
- Lack of formal borrowing track record
- Lack of stable or dependable incomes

Regulatory /governance

- Status and rights of informal settlements
- Lack of formal documentation, e.g. identity documents, security of tenure
- Lengthy, burdensome and inflexible donor processes and conditions
- Misalignment between donor objectives and actual needs of communities

Market

- The cost of traditional finance is prohibitively expensive
- Project size – too small for traditional funders
- Financial returns outweighs social, economic and environmental impact

Social

- Lack of financial literacy
- Language barriers
- Gender discrimination
- Corruption
- Non-participatory finance modalities.

Source: Ebrahim for CDKN (forthcoming, 2021).

The following noteworthy and sustainable financing approaches at community level are driving income generation and people's ability to accumulate savings and assets, in the context of the pandemic: (Ibrahim for CDKN, forthcoming, 2021)⁹²

• Village Savings and Loan Association Savings Groups

- Participatory self-managed and self-funding approach, based on saving money, earning interest and accessing savings as loans for income generation.

• Profit-sharing microfinance model

- Model based on the principles of a 'revolving credit facility', with a profit share mechanism.

• Kiva crowd-funding supported by local field partners

- International crowd-funding platform that partners with local field partners to facilitate loans to the financially underserved.

• Abalimi subsidy model

- Indirect funding mechanism whereby micro-farmers received essential training, resources and services at subsidised cost or below market prices.



In Cape Town, South Africa, civil society organisations have stepped up their efforts to ensure food security by supporting small-scale farming during COVID-19. © PlanAdapt



Civil society organisations have supported urban gardening in Cape Town's informal settlements during the pandemic through online training and sharing information via WhatsApp. © PlanAdapt

Financing mechanisms that have supported communities – and could be supported to expand their reach

Savings Groups, which form part of a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA), were identified as an important finance mechanism for accessing savings in order to purchase essentials, such as food and healthcare-related supplies, during the Covid-19 related lockdown(s). While it would usually not be considered desirable to access savings for basic daily consumptive purposes, these savings helped certain families temporarily meet their most basic needs for a short period of time during the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. These Savings Groups also provided opportunities for some to invest in alternative livelihoods.

Tresor Women Warriors (TWW) microfinance model comes from the [TWW not-for-profit foundation, based in The Gambia](#).⁹³ The organisation aims to empower women through engagement and support in the areas of agriculture, education, micro-financing, mentorship, and entrepreneurship. It has a network of around 7,000 members across The Gambia. The source of funding for the TWW microfinance scheme is the internal cash resources from TWW business ventures as well as the profit contributions from existing members (i.e. the TWW micro-finance scheme is a self-funding scheme). Small loans are provided to groups of women, who become members of the TWW network. Funding is not extended to individuals, but rather to groups of around ten women. This reduces the risk of default as the group is held responsible for repayment of the loan. Loans are only disbursed after the development of a business plan for funding and after capacity-building and training of the group members on financial and business literacy, technical skills (organic farming, soap making, animal husbandry, trading, etc.), technology adoption and mentorships. Capacity-building is a key component of the microfinance pilot scheme, which takes approximately two months. Loans are repayable after 6-12 months.

The Kiva crowd-funding platform is run by [Kiva](#),⁹⁴ a not-for-profit organisation based in San Francisco, USA. It facilitates loans from social impact lenders (i.e., individuals around the globe)

for a broad spectrum of activities in developing countries, such as for students to borrow money for tuition fees, entrepreneurs to start businesses, smallholder farmers to purchase equipment and families to pay for essential healthcare. Kiva collaborates with a global network of field partners (developmental and/or microfinance organisations) who work within local communities in remote areas and in emerging or developing economies. These field partners are vital to Kiva's work, as they provide essential services on the ground, such as (i) entrepreneurial training and financial literacy, (ii) vetting of potential borrowers and (iii) loan administration. These partnerships enable Kiva to reach more potential borrowers and deliver greater social impact.

The Abalimi Bezekhaya⁹⁵ 'subsidised cost' model in South Africa offers micro-farmers an indirect funding mechanism whereby they received essential training, resources and services at subsidised cost or below market price. It links with Harvest of Hope (HoH), a social enterprise, which operates as an aggregator of agricultural produce purchased from micro-farmers. The micro-farmers are paid once a month for their produce, net of input costs incurred with Abalimi. Abalimi thus supports micro-farmers by funding the upfront cost of inputs and agri-resources (i.e., a form of working capital finance). Abalimi provides a 'one-stop-shop' offering technical training and capacity-building, business mentorship, agri-resources and market access. The innovative partnership between Abalimi, as a development organisation, and HoH, as a social enterprise, to create an alternative market network for micro-farmers was key to creating a sustainable urban micro-farming ecosystem. Together Abalimi and HoH were able to provide the ongoing training, skills, resources, mentoring and market access to micro-farmers during the entire life cycle of an urban micro-farming enterprise, from survival to subsistence, then subsistence to livelihood and finally to commercial operations.

Source: Ebrahim for CDKN (forthcoming, 2021).⁹⁶



Climate action (SDG13)

*Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*⁹⁷

Challenges to climate action – the global picture

- Climate extremes have not taken a break during the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, evidence shows that the world is in a graver situation than ever before as a result of human-made climate change. Climate change is “widespread, rapid and intensifying”⁹⁸ said the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its July 2021 report Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis.⁹⁹ The report extinguished any doubt as to whether human activities were driving the changes, stating: “It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land.”
- The World Meteorological Organisation’s State of the Global Climate report found that concentrations of three major greenhouse gases in the atmosphere – carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide – were the highest ever recorded in 2019, and that despite COVID-19-related lockdowns and economic disruption, global greenhouse gas emissions¹⁰⁰ went up in 2020.
- The 191 Parties that have signed the Paris Agreement on climate change¹⁰¹ are responsible for submitting national climate plans to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), setting out how they will reduce or avoid greenhouse gas emissions and so put the world on track to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre industrial levels (which is the overarching temperature goal of the Agreement). So far, countries’ current policies would deliver a 2.9°C world, while their pledges would add up to 2.4°C of global warming.¹⁰²
- The 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) of the UNFCCC was delayed from late 2020 to November 2021 because of the global pandemic, leaving exceptionally little time for countries to hammer out improvements in their collective ambition. This includes rich countries making good on the promised \$100 billion in climate finance¹⁰³ they were due to disburse annually to poorer countries by 2020, but which is still well below these levels. The President of COP26, the United Kingdom’s Alok Sharma, has warned that time is running out to avert a global climate catastrophe.¹⁰⁴



A man with his family following Super-Cyclone Amphan in Satkhira in southwest Bangladesh. © YouthNet for Climate Justice

Challenges to climate action – local community perspectives

The confluence of the Covid-19 pandemic with weather and climate extremes is providing acute challenges for communities in all countries, and particularly in low-income countries and communities with fewer financial and material resources available to respond. The Voices from the Frontline give several personalised accounts of dealing with the compounded risks of Covid-19 and extreme weather or climate events, such as tropical storms, floods and droughts (to name but a few).

It is not always possible to say categorically that the extreme events we describe are a result of human-driven climate change, so we have been careful with our language. It can be [difficult to separate background climate variability from the effects of human-made climate change](#)¹⁰⁵ when trying to ascertain, for example, whether or not heavy rainfall happened in a city simply because it was an El Nino year?

However, the trends are clear. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) finds that extreme weather events have become more intense and frequent in the *past few decades* as a result of climate change. And, depending on regions and locations, many types of extreme weather and climate events may be expected to become more severe and frequent in the *coming decades*, as a result of global warming. Readers should consult scientists' projections carefully and refer to the [IPCC's regional atlas of the physical science of climate change](#)¹⁰⁶ for the most accurate understanding of what to expect in their country or region.

A poignant Voices from the Frontline [story comes from Jannatul Mawa](#)¹⁰⁷ in the coastal Satkhira district of southeast Bangladesh. Here, COVID-19 was spreading rapidly in the community, just as Super-Cyclone Amphan struck. Amphan was the [deadliest storm ever recorded in the Bay of Bengal](#),¹⁰⁸ bringing heavy rains and high tidal surges that destroyed dams and submerged low-lying lands and ponds. Saline water intruded further into the precious croplands of the district.

"Food shortages and rising commodity prices propelled community members to live on preserved dry foods (puffed rice, flattened rice and coconut) for many days. Availability of pure drinking water was also a major challenge," [Jannatul described](#).¹⁰⁹ It is clear how the risks to personal safety, health, nutrition and wellbeing can be compounded by the intersection of

extreme weather events and COVID-19. For example, the destruction of people's housing, water and food supplies by a cyclone can force them to move around and congregate in new ways to seek vital shelter, sanitation, water and food. These unplanned movements and gatherings of people can increase their exposure to the virus.

Meanwhile, in informal settlements in India, including the state of Assam, ruinously heavy monsoon rains arrived in mid-2020, just as the COVID-19 pandemic was also taking hold and residents were under lockdown orders. [The heavy rainfall, with consequent flooding and landslides](#),¹¹⁰ wreaked havoc in most of Indian states, including Assam. [A story from Bindu Singh](#),¹¹¹ a resident of Babu basti settlement in Guwahati, Assam, tells how, due to the devastating effects of the floods, she and other residents were forced to hastily retreat from their homes by a railway line and construct makeshift shelters and a toilet on raised land. Over the years, people have learned to build raised bamboo houses to save their belongings from floods, but this time, the raised shacks were also inundated.

"This time the floods approached without any warning, and the flood level exceeded twice the level it had crossed earlier," Bindu explained. "Also, the pandemic and subsequent lockdown left people with no money to buy bamboo and raise the platforms of their houses, forcing them to survive sleepless nights under those shelters." They were furthermore terrified by the risk of landslides. The increasingly crowded conditions in the shelters and reduction in sanitary facilities increased the residents' potential exposure to Covid-19.



A man swimming through flood waters from Super-Cyclone Amphan in Satkhira in southwest Bangladesh. © YouthNet for Climate Justice

Grassroots solutions on climate action

Covid-safe responses to climate emergencies. Seeing the compounded risks to people in Satkhira district, Bangladesh, [Jannatul Mawa and her team provided food relief packages](#)¹¹² to the most affected communities free of charge. They also developed a local sharing and caring model called “The Wall of Humanity” – a designated space where community members left their surpluses for those in need.

To ensure the safety of the cyclone-affected communities, Jannatul offered essential materials such as masks, hand sanitisers and disinfectants for free. “People are struggling to manage food for themselves; how will they buy masks and soaps? This is the time when we should support each other,” she explained.

Importantly, Jannatul works as part of a women-led local organisation, Bindu. The group’s previous experience in responding to extreme weather events contributed to its responsiveness and agility when Cyclone Amphan and Covid-19 collided in 2020.

In 2009, [Cyclone Aila](#)¹¹³ had wreaked havoc in the district, causing numerous casualties and saline intrusion that destroyed croplands. Since then, Satkhira district has been frequently affected by medium to high intensity cyclones at close intervals. The organisation Bindu was formed and began working on community outreach programmes in this context, advocating for gender equity, women’s empowerment and right to education, and climate



Community Action Group (CAG) leader Sarita Varnaival worked with other community leaders to distribute food parcels to the most vulnerable residents in the informal settlement of Shantiniketan in Surat, India, based on their own mapping of who was most in need. © Mahila Housing Trust



Community Action Group (CAG) leader Mumtaz distributes masks as part of her and other community leaders’ efforts to help migrants in quarantine centres in Sawda Ghevra in Delhi, India. © Mahila Housing Trust

justice. The contacts and trust that Bindu had developed in the communities – in response to earlier climate extremes – enabled the organisation to mobilise resources quickly in the wake of Cyclone Amphan and the pandemic.

In Guwahati, Assam, India, local people similarly organised to help themselves when the flooding and coronavirus disasters happened simultaneously. News of their locally-led initiatives grew by word of mouth, and attracted further collaboration ([see also ‘SDG17 Partnerships’, below](#)).¹¹⁴ For example, Arvind and Deepak [no last names given], together with members of their youth club, went door to door to raise awareness of essential hygiene measures to reduce Covid-19 transmission. They showed people how to wash their hands, wear masks and maintain physical distance.

To arrange money for food, they made a list of all contacts in their networks, and approached them for funds and food. Some of them also contributed their own wages. “We woke up early to work in the fish market to earn money to support the relief work,” Arvind said. This effort yielded enough donations to provide dry rations to the entire informal settlement. Eventually, they started getting calls from organisations such as Shishu Sarathi, YUVA, and others on how to collaborate and scale up efforts.

Enabling actions to support and work with community solutions

- Provide concessional finance (i.e. grants, very low interest or no interest loans) and/or in-kind materials, skills sharing and technological advice to help the poorest and most climate-exposed people to rebuild new housing and sanitation facilities after disasters that will better withstand the next extreme event. Although the stop-gap and longer-term organising efforts of communities to build social and political capital are hugely impressive, these stories highlight people's continued lack of financial means to build back from weather and climate-related disaster more resiliently.
- Couple this finance, capacity-building and technology for resilient reconstruction with greater investment in climate-smart land use zoning and building codes and their enforcement along with good local governance to reduce people's exposure to climate hazards in the future.
- Operationalise the [Santiago Network of Loss and Damage \(SNLD\)](#)¹¹⁵ under the UNFCCC, with clear administrative structures to support countries to access advice and support, and receive finance to assess loss and damage to rebuild more resiliently. A formal decision at the UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP26 in Glasgow, UK) would be the best way to do this.



250 volunteers worked with BIFERD in Goma, Congo, to create awareness about the virus, initiate income-generating activities for women, and provide small loans to support the most impacted communities. © BIFERD



Barengeke Ngini in Goma, Congo, started a business selling vegetables and fruit to support her family, with USD\$100 from local research organisation the Bureau of Information, Training, Exchanges and Research for Development (BIFERD). © BIFERD

Implement the REAP targets

The compounded risks of Covid-19 and weather and climate extremes documented by the Voices from the Frontline activists and leaders underscore the urgent need for international and national policies, financial disbursements, and large-scale humanitarian relief systems to 'catch up' with the real needs on the ground.

These stories demonstrate the absolute urgency of realising the ambitions of the Risk-informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) to make 1 billion people safer from disasters and achieve REAP's specific targets:

- 50 countries have reviewed and integrated their crisis/disaster risk management and climate adaptation laws, policies and plans to ensure that they reduce climate change impacts and exposure on people and the environment.
- 1 billion more people are covered by financing and delivery mechanisms connected to effective early action plans, ensuring they can get ahead of predicted disasters and crises.
- \$500 million invested in early warning system infrastructure and institutions to target early action in 'last/first mile' communities, building on existing initiatives.
- 1 billion more people are covered by new or improved early warning systems, including heatwave early warning, connected to longer-term risk management systems and supported by public awareness campaigns.



Partnerships for the goals (SDG17)

*Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development*¹¹⁶

Sustainable Development Goal 17¹¹⁷ is all about the importance of partnerships for delivering the goals. Partnerships are a major theme of the Voices from the Frontline stories, too. Partnerships with external actors are particularly vital when communities seek to move from ad hoc, short-term survival and self-help operations (such as individuals donating their own salaries or food supplies to others, over a few days or weeks) into more systematic initiatives, which often have a longer-term character, and which may be called ‘social protection’ (see box).

Social protection

Social protection is “the set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout the life cycle. Social protection includes nine main areas: child and family benefits, maternity protection, unemployment support, employment injury benefits, sickness benefits, health protection (medical care), old age benefits, invalidity/disability benefits, and survivors’ benefits. Social protection systems address all these policy areas by a mix of contributory schemes (social insurance) and non-contributory tax-financed benefits (including social assistance).” (ILO, 2017: 194)¹¹⁸



Saleshni Wati and her family in lockdown. Residents of Nanuku settlement in Suva, Fiji contended with both Covid-19 and Cyclone Harold.
© Pacific Center for Environment and Sustainable Development

Challenges to partnerships – local community perspectives

When partnerships are lacking or have appeared ‘blocked’ because of the Covid-19 pandemic, community members’ wellbeing and longer-term development prospects have worsened. Sometimes government or external partner interventions are ill-designed or insufficiently delivered. For instance, community organisations complain of cash transfers, micro-loans or relief from both government and NGOs being improperly targeted and missing the poorest and most vulnerable, as in The Gambia.¹¹⁹

Non-cooperation from government has been echoed in many stories. In Bangladesh, the local administration refused to cooperate regarding community proposals for a Covid-safe, makeshift vegetable market.¹²⁰ In Fiji, the government halted training programmes¹²¹ for running small business for an indefinite period, without exploring alternatives.

There have been instances (e.g. in Nepal) where emergency financial or material help, such as cash transfers and food relief have back-fired due to lack of support for and integration with local actors – often due to a lack of coordination with and adequate resourcing for the local government and/or for local civil society organisations, which would have been well placed to help. For example in a Dalit [lower caste] community in Nepal, far away from the capital city, relief and financial resources hardly reached households, as the local municipality was not interested in travelling a great distance to distribute packages. Moreover, there were cases of rotten food being distributed that communities refused to take. Furthermore, the Nepal government imposed the so-called ‘One Door’ policy, restricting organisations other than the government from distributing relief.

Such non-cooperation has further complicated the struggle to advance all aspects of wellbeing and development and secure progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, in the context of Covid-19.

Partnership solutions to multi-hazard risks: across actors and scales

Partnership with government for service delivery. One of the most prevalent and successful forms of partnership in the stories is between community activists and the various offices and agencies of government when they work together to identify those people most in need of services and to connect them with services, such as health, food and nutrition and social protection.

In [Rafiq Nagar, the informal settlement of Mumbai, India](#),¹²² Shamimbanu Salim Sheikh said that many external actors typically refuse to enter the slum. “Nobody outside the community, whether it’s the police, doctors or [municipal corporation – local government] officers, dares to come inside this area. They are scared that they will get infected and diagnosed with various diseases if they enter this slum.” Despite this, Shamimbanu reported that there exists cooperation and accountability between the Member of the Legislative Assembly representing Rafiq Nagar and the residents. The Member has taken the responsibility of ensuring basic services, including water supply and proper drainage facilities, in addition to building a small hospital for residents, providing them with access to medicine and contacts for emergency services. Furthermore, the Member arranged for a medical camp in the Rafiq Nagar area to check people for Covid-19 symptoms.

The leaders of an [informal settlement in Pune, India](#),¹²³ coordinated with local government officials and helped them distribute food packages. Together with the municipal corporation, they installed speakers on the main roads and gave instructions at different times of the day. The team also helped the ward officers in tracking patients, encouraging isolation and carrying out rapid household tests to reduce the community spread.

Partnership with NGOs for building people’s adaptive capacity. In the context of longer-term adaptive capacity and resilience building (in this case, to recover from the pandemic and create resilience to climate risks), community partnerships with international NGOs and their national chapters are proving successful when framed and driven by the priorities of diverse members of the local community, including women, youth and people with disabilities.

This is evident in the [story from Kurigam, Bangladesh](#),¹²⁴ where the Nari Associate for Revival and Initiative (NARI), a women’s community-based organisation, is training women to seek alternative livelihood opportunities. In this process, they link them with the private sector to market their products. They seek to support divorced women and widows, and prevent violence against women and early marriage for girls.

Initially, NARI received technical and financial support from Practical Action and the Jute Diversification Promotion Centre (JDPC) for needs-based training on handicrafts, sewing, and livestock rearing. Now, they have their own trainers. “The journey that began with one sewing machine has come a long way. Now we have a factory with 78 looms and, over the years, about 700-800 women have acquired skill in making handicrafts,” shared Farida Easmin, Executive Director.

NARI’s members help each other by providing resources during natural disasters, and distribute whatever they receive from different donors. They also collaborate with other women-headed organisations and offer them training on alternative livelihoods.

Adaptive capacities go beyond just the assets and income at people’s disposal and is also about “recognising the importance of various intangible processes: decision-making and governance; the fostering of innovation, experimentation and opportunity exploitation; and the structure of institutions and entitlements.” ([Jones et al, 2010](#))¹²⁵



A women-headed organisation, Nari Associate for Revival and Initiative (NARI), distributes food and hygiene kits in the Kurigam district of Bangladesh. © NARI

Partnership on public engagement. Government authorities and community members have also forged partnerships to disseminate information about the Covid-19 pandemic very effectively. These forms of collaborative work could easily be replicated and scaled up for other forms of disaster risk reduction and preparedness, including around climate risks (see climate, above).

In [Satkhira district, Bangladesh](#),¹²⁶ Jannatul Mawa and her team conducted courtyard meetings in the communities to demonstrate proper ways of wearing masks and washing hands, as per the guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Ministry of Health in Bangladesh. In addition, they distributed leaflets, posters and implemented awareness campaigns in local language about the nature of the virus.

To cater to a wide audience, Jannatul also collaborated with a local radio station known as Nalta, to disseminate information and important guidelines. She has facilitated the formation of a local network called the “Corona Expert Team”, consisting of local men, women, youth, social workers and community journalists. The network works to foster relationships between the community and local government. Together with the local government, the network has hosted training workshops for local youth volunteers on emergency response measures during Covid-19.

In [Moulvibazar, Bangladesh](#),¹²⁷ the community added value to the government’s public health campaign by translating it into local languages. “They wanted to start off by sharing leaflets with important information and precautionary measures related to Covid-19. But since many of them do not understand Bengali language, they decided to run awareness campaigns in the local language (Khasia) instead,” Sohanur Rahman reported.

In Kenya, indigenous [Masaai women worked as community health workers](#)¹²⁸ and disseminated information on home-based care approaches in a vertical manner, from government to local communities. They also developed a community-led Covid-19 information strategy that involved collaborating with and mobilising women groups, local churches, community health workers, and village elders.

Enabling actions to support partnerships

- Provide recognition for and legitimise community-based organisations. Community-based organisations have invaluable sources of data, trusted planning, decision-making and knowledge translation, and dissemination processes that are crucial during times of crisis. If given proper recognition and legitimacy, such trusted networks can be critical in fostering strong relations between vulnerable groups and local authorities.
- These recommendations not only extend to national governments – many of which also face fiscal crises in a pandemic – but also to external development partners and aid actors who have an opportunity, in coordination with governments, to bolster local capacities.
- Through partnering with external agencies, grassroots organisations can augment and amplify existing efforts as well as co-create sustainable solutions.
- Stronger collaboration between government and community-based organisations to coordinate relief efforts can be instrumental in tackling social marginalisation and exclusion and ensuring everyone has access to assistance.



A young boy from the Khasia community in Moulvibazar, Bangladesh, plays behind a fence erected during lockdown. Community leaders enforced strict restrictions to protect lives during the pandemic. © Gdision Prodhan Suchiang, headman of Magurchhara punji and the president of Khasi Social Council.

Discussion and recommendations

Discussion

- The individual stories in the Voices from the Frontline demonstrate the interconnectedness of all these SDGs and the enabling measures that unlock development progress in communities. Although presented as separate chapters above, in reality these challenges and enablers are completely interlinked in people's lives.
- People's initiative and resourcefulness, especially that of women and young people, leverages food security, promotes hygiene, health measures and good information; and inspires micro-entrepreneurship, within and across communities.
- The degree of effort and ingenuity is awe-inspiring. At the same time, especially during the later Voices from the Frontline stories in the series, we perceived individuals, households, and communities beginning to hit some limits to resilience due to the longevity of the Covid-19 pandemic and related economic crisis. For example, savings and loans associations' reserves became depleted, and individuals who had donated their own wages for a month to feed neighbours or buy supplies for the neighbourhood were unable to keep this up for the longer-term as an act of generosity.
- This points to the need not only for longer-term transformation in the provision of services in these underserved areas, but also, critically, for transformation in governance structures, processes and financial flows along with the trust and accountability that also needs to underpin them.
- Sarah Nandudu, national leader of the National Slum Dwellers Federation of Uganda, has observed, "The frontline funds are so limited that we can't go to scale. The thing we can do is precedent setting projects. Then we expect externals, like governments, to help us to scale up. Or we ensure other people hold our hands to help us go to scale. We want to join hands with partners on these initiatives that we have already created and driven, and we want to take [it] to scale. Our interventions may take 5-10%, but once we join hands with other agencies, we can go to scale." ([30 June 2021, Frontline Funds presentation](#))¹²⁹

What have we learned about what is working well, and which of these experiences provide real hope for the future?

- **The social capital in a community is a component of resilience:** Social institutions and networks, NGOs and civil society organisations are stepping in to fill the role of the state and private sector in providing hygiene information and products, for example. They are well placed, as they are situated in communities and embedded in community relations. We also note that while community responses to the pandemic have drawn on existing social capital, they have built new social capital, too.
- **Savings and Loans Associations have provided a source of survival funds:** In the short-term, these associations have been crucial in the fight against hunger/malnutrition – and some are still enabling small microenterprise start-ups. Where these associations have already been in place before the pandemic, they have proven instrumental in providing members with a financial buffer in the face of lockdowns and financial hardships.
- **Women are demonstrating new forms of leadership:** Women have often been at the frontline of communities' actions to combat Covid-related hardships. Furthermore, some women leaders have identified this crisis situation as an important opportunity to leverage female empowerment and intentionally prevent backsliding on women's human rights.
- **Communities are creating new spaces for development innovation:** Young people have often been at the forefront of countering misinformation about Covid-19 and its prevention – misinformation which has been enabled to spread even more readily than in previous eras due to social media. At the same time, young people have also been leaders in leveraging the power of digital technology for the creation or expansion of new markets. Innovation has existed on many other levels, too, not just in the increased use of information and communication (ICT) technologies. Community groups and businesses have come up with new work protocols for the pandemic context (as with the [Colombian waste pickers](#)¹³⁰ association) and have also innovated new products and services (as with the [Nepali youth start-up](#)¹³¹ to create value from waste).

Recommendations

Recommendations for external actors including central and state governments, external development partners, and international agencies are as follows:

Work quickly, responsively, and flexibly with local civil society organisations/community groups to meet immediate health and hygiene needs in the pandemic context.

- **Information.** Recognise these entities as well placed to counter misinformation and propagate accurate hygiene, sanitation information and its uptake – framed in ways (language, messenger, delivery) more likely to have traction in local contexts. Draw on the untapped potential of community members as health communicators.
- **Hygiene measures.** They have the person-power to directly implement hygiene measures such as sanitising water access points.
- **Hygiene products.** They have the human resources to distribute supplies.

Rethink civic partnerships between local government and civil society organisations.

Devolve decision-making to the local level as far as possible and support the local organisations to design and implement their ideas and to contribute to their own economic upliftment – but work with multiple and diverse local organisations so as not to privilege one group (e.g. older men) over another (e.g. younger women). Support women's and youth organisations, and take gender-responsive approaches.



Residents of informal settlements in Guwahati, India, worked together to spread awareness for responding to both Covid-19 and monsoon floods.
© Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action

Support and co-fund existing and innovative micro-finance mechanisms and similar vehicles to expand the reach and scale of relevant needs-driven finance for locally-led projects. The Village Savings and Loans Group, for instance, is a well-established microfinance mechanism in the informal economy of many developing countries, and there is an opportunity to support and scale the impact of these associations. One way would be to introduce technology and related training to improve the efficiency of administrative and financial management systems.

In addition to these self-help finance models, there is a need and opportunity for more **funds from public and private sources to be channelled to the local level**. Our research highlights the potential of the **profit-sharing model, subsidised inputs model and crowd-funding model**.

There is a particular need to **make finance more inclusive** for young people and women who may have few assets or collateral but who are highly motivated to invest for their own and their families' futures. There are two important recommendations flowing from this: (i) expand microfinance to these groups; and (ii) support **community-based organisations, especially women's and youth groups, to build their capacity** including their technical, administrative and financial management skills.

Invest in literacy, education and advocacy skills at the community level so that community members may articulate more effectively to policy-makers what they want and need. As [Sheela Patel of Slum Dwellers International \(SDI\) reminds us](#),¹³² "We haven't yet invested in making local communities make representations on what they want."



Dalit communities (also known as 'untouchables') in Kunni Kharka, Nepal, used collective savings and strengthened community bonds to tackle the Covid-19 crisis. © National Campaign for Sustainable Development, Nepal.

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Hanifa, president of the Bamia Village Savings and Lending Association, in her grocery shop. Community savings groups in rural southwest Bangladesh helped revive local economies devastated by the combined impacts of Covid-19 and Super-Cyclone Amphan. © Saeqah Kabir, World Vision Bangladesh



In Southwest Bangladesh, Moyna washes her hands before a community savings group meeting. The group enabled Moyna to take out loans to meet her daughters' education expenses and invest in a vegetable garden during the pandemic. © Saeqah Kabir, World Vision Bangladesh

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CDKN supports decision-makers in developing countries in designing and delivering climate compatible development. We do this by combining knowledge sharing, research and advisory services in support of locally owned and managed policy processes. CDKN works in partnership with decision-makers in the public, private and non-governmental sectors nationally, regionally and globally.

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The GRP is an inclusive and diverse group of organisations working together to surface and scale innovation, share and advance knowledge, and influence policy towards a more resilient world.

Please visit www.globalresiliencepartnership.org

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