

PROTECTING A GENERATION FROM COVID-19

An agenda for global action for the UK

COVID-19 knows no borders. It is a global threat and demands a global response. The health crisis caused by the virus has unleashed a social and economic crisis with profound implications for the world's most deprived and marginalised children. The UK Government is well placed to provide the leadership required to ensure that no child is left behind by the global Covid-19 response and should focus in five key areas.

1. DISEASE CONTAINMENT AND MITIGATION

There is urgent need for a single, coordinated global plan of action to support national-led responses to slow the spread and mitigate against the worst impacts of COVID-19 across the world. Delayed action on prevention and containment could cost over 3 million lives in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa alone.

We need to act quickly. There is a narrow window of 4 – 8 weeks to put in place preparedness and mitigation measures before the pandemic waves overwhelm countries' health systems. The UK should:

- **Support health and nutrition services for all, free at the point of use for the duration of the crisis.** This should include financial and technical support to the public health sector in low- and middle-income countries to enable the requisition of private health services to create a unified approach, free at the point of use, to achieve equity in access and outcomes.
- **The UK must contribute urgently to the mobilisation of \$8 billion of donor funds for a coherent and coordinated global plan,** led by the WHO and delivered through Governments and other partners who are best placed to quickly mobilise in each country. This plan must focus on building strong and resilient health and nutrition systems, engage civil society, and support government-led country strategies and should prioritise marginalised and vulnerable populations, reaching down to the primary care and community level.
- **Critical services preventing maternal, new-born and child deaths must not be neglected,** including infant and young child feeding, immunisation, sexual and reproductive and maternal health services. To ensure sustainable change it is vital that the UK still makes a substantial investment this year in Nutrition for Growth and Gavi, the Global Vaccine Alliance.

2. GLOBAL FINANCING

The world's poorest countries do not have the fiscal capacity either to make the health system investments that are needed, or to protect the most vulnerable citizens – including children – from the social and economic impacts of coronavirus. Africa alone is estimated to need \$100 billion in emergency economic stimulus to mitigate against these impacts at a macro-level. The UK should:

- **Ensure that the ability of countries to protect children from the impacts of COVID-19 is not undermined by debt servicing requirements.** This should include:
 - Continue to work with the G20 to ensure action on the agreed suspension of debt payments from IDA countries to official bilateral creditors
 - Working with the IMF, World Bank and G20 on a package of support for other developing countries at risk of debt distress, and to address the underlying issue of unsustainable debt stock held by many countries.
- **Pledge urgent financial and political support to the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19,** while also continuing to support existing humanitarian response plans to ensure the most vulnerable do not become even more susceptible to the effects of the pandemic.
- **Ensure that countries can access the additional, quality financing they need to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.** This should include providing leadership at the World Bank and IMF to support emergency financing and the African finance ministers' call to increase accessible IMF funding, as well as immediate solutions for countries that need support but do not qualify due to existing arrears.
- **Ensure that the UK Aid response prioritises support for the most vulnerable countries and children,** with a focus on strengthening public health, education and social protection systems.

3. SUPPORT FOR FAMILY FINANCES

Loss of jobs, income and livelihoods, combined with the threat of global recession and rising, threatens the safety, wellbeing and nutrition of millions of children. Many of the poorest countries have not invested sufficiently in

building inclusive social protection systems, and now lack the foundations needed to provide direct support to families. The UK Government should:

- **Invest in scaling up national social protection schemes and systems** where available to deliver a rapid response, alongside providing complementary humanitarian cash, voucher and in-kind assistance as appropriate. The UK must ensure that all responses delivering direct support are inclusive and fulfil the rights of the most vulnerable, including women and girls, people with disabilities and marginalised groups.
- **Prioritise nutrition**, ensuring that children and other nutritionally vulnerable groups have support to enable them to access appropriate, safe and nutritious food. The period from conception to a child's 2nd birthday is critical to avoid life-long negative impacts.

4. EDUCATION AND LEARNING

1.5 billion children and students across 188 countries are currently out of school because of the crisis. We know from the Ebola crisis that this is likely to lead to increased child labour, child marriage and teenage pregnancy, especially for the most deprived and marginalised, preventing a return to school. We also know that once out of school, there is a risk that children will not return. The UK can provide leadership to mitigate the impact of school closures and uphold the right of every child to a safe, quality, inclusive education, and should:

- We welcome the UK's additional £5m for Education Cannot Wait, which is adapting education programmes in countries affected by conflict and displacement to ensure the most marginalised children can access distance learning. The UK can continue to lead the way by **calling on other bilateral donors to increase funding for education in their global response and provide top-up funding to other multilaterals** like the Global Partnership for Education where necessary.
- **The UK should provide additional funding** for mid-term needs including:
 - Supporting governments and partners to sustain teacher salaries or incentives, so that schools have the staff they need to re-open after the pandemic.
 - Safe school re-opening programmes, with a focus on WASH provision, and activities to reintegrate adolescent girls and other groups at risk of not returning to school.

5. CHILDREN'S SAFETY AND PROTECTION

Crises exacerbate existing inequalities and most affect the most deprived and marginalised. The biggest loss of life may in the short run come from an erosion of humanitarian programming. It is therefore critical to ensure sustained funding for ongoing humanitarian action and continuing access for aid workers. The UK should:

- **Support the UN Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire**, using its position on the UN Security Council to ensure that the Council adopts a strong and unequivocal Resolution on this issue.
- **Press governments and international agencies to classify the social services workforce and humanitarians as essential workers**, ensuring they are well-resourced and allowing them to continue to go about delivering essential services irrespective of movement restrictions. The UK should press parties to conflict to ensure a neutral and impartial humanitarian space and uphold humanitarian access.
- **Ensure that all interventions work to mitigate against confinement, school closures and disrupted care arrangements increasing risks of gender-based violence, child abuse, neglect and exploitation.** The UK should also prioritise targeted interventions and include safeguarding, child protection, mental health and psychosocial support, as well as sexual and reproductive health response measures, for child survivors.

WORKING WITH INGOs TO DELIVER

To deliver on these priorities, DFID should prioritise financing INGO programmes, ensuring the ability to operate at scale as well as country-level ownership through their local partnerships. INGOs and their partners are the best delivery mechanism available to DFID to support awareness-raising about COVID-19 at community level, grassroots health services, initiatives for out-of-school children, social protection mechanisms, and support for people who are vulnerable as a result of lock-downs. This could include initiatives such as working with INGOs to develop appropriate national and global interventions, opening a challenge fund to finance specific INGO proposals and match-funding INGO appeals. To enable an effective response, DFID must apply maximum flexibility in funding, and advocate for this principle with other donors including the UN.

