

APRIL 2020

# ATD Fourth World Regional Gatherings on the Impact of Covid-19 on African Children

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ATD (All Together in Dignity) Fourth World is a movement of solidarity among and in collaboration with the most excluded families around the world. Founded in 1957 by Joseph Wresinski in France, ATD Fourth World, active in 34 countries, brings together people from different cultures and social classes. It is an international non-governmental organization with no religious or political affiliation. With the goal of leaving no one behind, all our projects are designed and planned with people living in persistent poverty and aim to bring their voices to all decision-making spheres, including at the global level.

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# KEY MESSAGES:

- In many African nations, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing difficulties, such as other diseases, natural disasters, and hunger, which the poorest families and their children face every day.
- It is much more difficult for families who live in remote areas or those with limited access to technology to educate themselves about the disease and learn about protective measures.
- Children without access to technology or a quiet space to study are unable to focus on their academics during this time. Adolescents are particularly at risk of dropping out of school to earn money to help their parents.
- Children who live in orphanages or on the streets are especially affected by the pandemic, as many protective measures (such as social distancing and restrictive movement) cannot apply to those who are homeless.
- Listening to the lived experiences of these families has prompted ATD Fourth World to develop short- and long-term recommendations in Africa. One short-term measure will be to provide continuous support to the most vulnerable children and adolescents with their education by all means possible so that no child will fall behind in their studies during this pandemic. A long-term measure is to make sure that local African communities are involved in the establishment and implementation of protective social measures instead of simply copy and pasting measures from different realities and contexts.
- With these recommendations, ATD Fourth World is dedicated to making sure that these families will be included in the conversation to realize sustainable solutions for a healthier future.

On April 17th and April 21st, ATD Fourth World held two regional gatherings which included 10 local teams active in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Senegal, Tanzania, and Togo.

These teams are involved in the day-to-day life of the most disadvantaged families living in their respective countries. Their partnership with local citizens created a sense of trust, solidarity and friendship among families and children which supported their dreams and projects. **Whether it is access to culture or knowledge, defense of human rights, contribution to policymaking, or engaging with the general public, our actions must include the participation and voices of people in extreme poverty.** This will allow them to contribute to the recognition and development of their communities.

# INTRODUCTION

**THE GENERAL CONSENSUS FOUND THAT THESE COUNTRIES ARE FACING A PERMANENT CRISIS WITH HIGH LEVELS OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY.**

Even if the number of coronavirus cases in Africa is relatively low compared to Europe and North America, the lack of infrastructure and access to health care and information in some regions increases the fragility already faced by the poorest families and children. The governments in the mentioned countries have taken various measures to protect citizens. In urban areas, people know about basic protective measures.

However, this information has not reached outlying areas that are lacking resources. In remote areas with limited access to technology such as national telecommunication networks, radios and televisions, it is difficult for the population to gain access to information about the pandemic and protective measures.

Communities have already been facing other problems, including epidemics such as malaria, cholera, Ebola and measles. The coronavirus pandemic has simply added an additional layer of difficulties. For example, on April 17th, in South Kivu, specifically in Uvira, which is located in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, deadly flooding has swept away people, their homes and community infrastructure. It is in this context that the pandemic is reaching communities within the African region.



Preventive measures taken to slow the spread of the coronavirus have led to the closure of social institutions such as schools, churches, and mosques, and with economic slowdown (including business and market closure with movement restrictions), these measures are negatively impacting families already struggling.



## EFFECTS ON THE POOREST FAMILIES

We know that a child belongs to a family and a family lives in a community, so it is important for us to start with what the poorest families are facing. **Now, these families are confronting a sudden lack of opportunities to earn a living and grappling with the fear of hunger and death.** The fear of illness remains a constant worry because illness, for them, is too close to death.

*Elisabeth, a child from Burundi, told us: “My mom is sick and if we are infected with this disease, she will not have the money to pay for the hospital.”*

Because of traffic restrictions from city to city, pharmacy stocks are dwindling. **A mother with a chronic illness in the DRC tells us that she cannot afford her medicine because it has become scarce and expensive.** In most countries there is widespread fear of going to the clinic, as people fear they may contract the Covid-19 or be side-lined for a small fever.

The pandemic also deprives individuals and families living in poverty of their daily income for their survival. The closure of borders and restriction of movements between provinces as well as the closure of markets have damaged informal activities, in particular that of small businesses. Food prices and transport costs have gone up sharply. **For example, in the DRC, a can of water, which used to cost between 50 and 100 Congolese francs, now costs 200 francs or more.**



*Gentil, 12, who lives in the DRC, said, “In my family, it is difficult to get soap all day, so we use ash to wash our hands and to keep ourselves clean.”*

*According to 12-year-old Francine: “We use the water from the gutters to wash ourselves because drinking water is expensive.”*

With very little or in-existent social protection, many families and their children find themselves in extremely difficult situations. *A mother in the DRC said, “Right now my activities are slowing down. Everyone thinks of food first because we are not sure of what will happen tomorrow. I don't know if you too are feeling hungry like me...”*

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In Ganzourgou, a rural part of Burkina Faso, life is very hard. **This is the time of the lean season, which is the period between the end of the harvest and before the sowing phase, and it is usually more difficult for those who have fewer reserves.** At this time, men would usually go to work in the mines or in the capital to help their families. Due to the restriction of movements outside of the provinces, many families are unable to provide food for their children.

## EFFECTS ON THE CHILDREN

This pandemic has worsened community life, and many children have been badly affected both indirectly and directly.

**In many countries across the African continent, governments have launched school lessons on radio or television, but not all children have access to electronic devices or have a quiet space to focus on their studies.** The poorest children are therefore the most affected. **For them, this interruption in education risks the establishing of “a blank year” of learning.** Unfortunately, this risk is especially prominent for adolescents who will most likely not resume their schooling after the confinement.

*Pape Mody, a young man from Senegal, had told us before the crisis that adolescents like him suffer from seeing their parents exhausted from working, and young people drop out of school so that they could contribute to the family's income.*

In the Central African Republic, Pascal, aged 12, collects small pieces of metal to sell from the various trash cans he finds. **For many children, poverty forces them to take on many responsibilities within the family, and they then lose their innocence of childhood.**

**In Burkina Faso, life has become even more difficult for children living in**

**orphanages or on the streets.** Those living on the streets had left their villages with the hope to earn enough to help their families back home. **In this period of restrictive movement and social distancing, these children lose all the security they had secured: a place to sleep, personal hygiene, and access to their daily meal.** Passersby talk as though the children living on the street are responsible for the virus. *Alex from the Central African Republic said, “They even do their business on us when we sleep next to the street.”*

The preventive measures of social distancing are inapplicable to these children. Many feel more secure together, especially after the 8pm curfew, when they have to find a place to sleep or take shelter which, in most cases, is either inside schools or on rooftops.

**There are many children living in orphanages in the Central African Republic, and despite the harsh life inside and outside, it is worth noting there is a lot of love and solidarity.** Those outside come to visit the children in the centre. They talk to each other through the gate and they leave small gifts.

# ATD FOURTH WORLD RESPONSE

After restrictive actions were put in place by the African governments, the first response from ATD Fourth World teams was to look for innovative ways to stay in touch with families and children as well as to spread information about the virus and protective measures.

**The ATD Fourth World team in Burundi decided to designate each child an ambassador so that they too could be the part of an actor in the fight against Covid-19.**

*Bibi Teddy commented: "We don't have smartphones, or internet access, we don't even know how to use them. What you are doing is very useful to our children."*

**In Kenya, ATD Fourth World has recently started a Taporu group in Kibera, the largest slum in Africa.** Taporu is the children branch of ATD Fourth World, a global network creating friendship between children of different socio-economic backgrounds. Before the pandemic, the Taporu activities used to take place in a school in the Kibera slum. **Now that the school has closed, the Taporu facilitators, accompanied by teachers, visit the children twice a week at their homes to identify the most isolated and vulnerable children and their families.** The activities consist of reading mini-books, drawing pictures with messages of hope and love, raising awareness about limiting the spread of Covid-19 in the community, and informing them about government preventive measures.

In the DRC, ATD Fourth World used radio broadcasts to spread awareness by creating radio shows with children and sharing their experiences on an empowering public platform.

**In CAR, our team has provided mobile water sources with soap by entrusting responsibility to a group of young people in each neighborhood who also take the time to inform many people who pass by about the virus.** As a result, the families who have been made aware have reciprocated by taking up the responsibility of raising awareness to and sensitizing others.

**In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, our team has been conducting street libraries for the past fifteen years.** After the closure of schools due to this pandemic, some private schools, NGOs and other institutions decided to help their students by providing exercises and tests through internet and TV programs.

*Mama Maria from Tandale, Tanzania, said: "My grandchildren had no one to help them with their lessons. Without you they would forget everything they have learned!"*





As many families cannot afford modern technology, the 10 ATD Fourth World teams were prompted to reach those students who cannot have access to TV, smartphones or internet: **the forgotten ones**. They prepared some exercises from books and newspapers or downloaded some off of the internet, and then duplicated and distributed them to students in the area.

From ATD Fourth World's experiences in 10 countries in Africa, it is clear that we cannot talk about child poverty and their experience of Covid-19 without talking about families who need to be better supported in their right to a dignified life.

Beyond its devastating effects, the pandemic should be an opportunity to create a world where all children, especially the most vulnerable, have the same chance of growing up, realizing their dreams, be in solidarity with other children worldwide and unleashing their potential.

These lived experiences prompted ATD Fourth World to create two sets of recommendations, both short- and long-term.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## SHORT-TERM MEASURES:

- Continuous support to the most vulnerable children and adolescents with their education by all means possible.
- Encouraging and training young people from diverse backgrounds to be role models in their communities.
- Ensure that the most marginalized people are not left out in the campaign against Covid-19 and are provided with the required materials.
- Access to food and support to the informal sector for the most vulnerable families via cash transfer that respects their dignity.

## LONG-TERM MEASURES:

- Investment in medical infrastructures and access to medicine for all.
- Communities should be involved in the establishment and implementation of protective measures instead of copy and pasting measures from different realities and contexts.
- Establishing universal social protection fundamentals to ensure access to health care and minimum income security for all children and families, especially the most marginalized.
- Access to quality education systems for all children, especially those most vulnerable.
- Creating green jobs for the poorest communities for sustainable economic transition.
- Encouraging citizen engagement in social change and respect for the environment by fostering a sense of solidarity with the poorest segments of society. It will be important to call on people from all walks of life to promote social cohesion and be in solidarity with the most vulnerable, as they are at the forefront of the fight against poverty.

**We cannot succeed in reducing inequalities and building a fair society without taking into account the knowledge and experience of the people who experience poverty and social exclusion on a daily basis.**

**In times of crisis, children must be able to live their childhood without being forced to assume adult responsibilities. It is essential to think of a cultural and educational system that continues to cultivate the pleasure of learning and taste for discovery in a spirit of shared knowledge. In many countries, schools are a major contributor to deepening and sustaining inequalities. This crisis challenges our current approach to sharing knowledge in a spirit of cooperation, support for creativity, autonomy to think, and co-responsibility.**



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# REGIONAL GROUPS AND TEAMS IN AFRICA

## IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

### **Burkina Faso**

Florent BAMBARA  
Moïse COMPAORE  
Bertine DAKOURE  
Oussémi GOUBA  
Faustin NDRABU  
Marcel YAMEOGO

### **Burundi**

Pacifique CUBAHIRO  
Luc IRENGE  
Salehe KAZIGE  
Reine KIMANA  
Consolante NSABIYYMVA  
Christian RUGWANSANYE

### **Cameroon**

Emmanuel NONGUE

### **Kenya**

Terry Kiarie WANJIRU  
Martin KALISA

### **Central African Republic**

Arnauld DA  
Enock LOGUE  
Brafinel AIMERIC  
Sylvain KALDE  
Clarance NGARAFO  
Herbert NGARAFO  
Odyle NGUEMAS  
Nadège OUILIKON  
Cédric REKONZI  
Niek TWEEHUIJSEN

### **Democratic Republic of the Congo based in Bukavu**

Arsène BABINGWA  
Rosine IRAGA  
Chirac BAFURUME  
Deogratias KANKELE  
Toussaint KARAGI  
Bob KATEMBO  
Emmanuel MUSGISHI  
Sahidi MUHARABU  
Olga TUSALA

### **Senegal**

Alassane GANO  
Ronaldo GOMIS  
Jean-Michel KANTOUSSAN  
Mahamadou KONE  
Alban SOUSSANGO

### **Tanzania**

Hamisi Mac Kurde  
Salma Avith MOSHA  
Pelagie MUKAMPAMIRA  
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### **Regional Delegation for Africa based in Dakar, Senegal**

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