



PRIORITIZING THE WORLD'S CHILDREN

A PLAYBOOK FOR LEADERS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

“Prioritizing the World’s Children” identifies key issues and challenges facing children and families today that deserve urgent action. With 2020 U.S. elections now decided, this playbook contains analysis and recommendations from Save the Children experts to help leaders at the federal, state and local level ensure that children in the U.S. and around the world can survive and thrive.

3 INTRODUCTION

4 “BUILD BACK BETTER” IN THE TIME OF COVID – CREATING A STRONGER, HEALTHIER WORLD

6 KEEPING KIDS LEARNING ACROSS AMERICA DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

8 NOURISH THE NATION BY COMBATTING CHILD HUNGER

10 PRESERVING THE PLANET FOR OUR CHILDREN

12 CHILD CARE: ESSENTIAL TO THE U.S. ECONOMY

14 IMMIGRANT CHILDREN DESERVE BETTER

16 REFUGEES CAN REBUILD — WITH OUR HELP

18 A FREER, FAIRER WORLD DEMANDS EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

20 PEACE IS POSSIBLE FOR PEOPLE IN YEMEN

SAVE THE CHILDREN DOES WHATEVER IT TAKES — EVERY DAY
AND IN TIMES OF CRISIS — **TRANSFORMING CHILDREN’S LIVES**
AND THE FUTURE WE SHARE.

A NEW PATH TO HELP ALL CHILDREN

By Janti Soeripto, *President and CEO*

Pandemics, conflicts and economic downturns have tested us before. Yet we find ourselves in truly unprecedented times. Never before has the world faced the lethal convergence of a global pandemic, raging regional conflict, disrupted economic growth and soaring inequality, racial inequities, a climate crisis, and demagogues with the ability to spread harmful messages instantaneously through social media. These challenges are felt in the U.S. and countries around the world. As is so often the case, children are the least responsible and yet the most negatively affected.

But just as we face a moment of historic challenges, a new Administration, Congress, and elected officials at state and local levels create a moment of great opportunity for new, far-sighted leadership. Simply put, the country will not fully recover from the pandemic and move forward unless we place children at the center of the plan.

Getting millions of kids back in school and opening child care centers so that children can learn and parents can work is vital. An estimated 60 percent of child care programs are currently closed. Equally important and eminently within our grasp is addressing the growing hunger crisis. Every night, in the richest country in the world, 50 million people, including 17 million children are going to bed without enough nutritious food to eat. That is wrong and must be fixed.

Issues that go to what the country stands for at its core and will shape our path for decades to come also require urgent action. Leaders need to develop and act on plans to humanely protect families seeking help on the U.S. southern border. They must address systemic racism and inequities that hold Black and Hispanic children back generation after generation. And this must be the decade that we tackle climate change before it is truly too late. Americans cannot prosper if our planet remains at risk.

The new Administration and Congress must also turn their attention to the world's children, whose future are intertwined with and affect our own. Over the last two decades, U.S. leadership has contributed to reducing poverty, increasing access to quality learning, improving health for women and children, and saving lives during horrific humanitarian crises. Yet today, U.S. credibility and leadership in the world is in jeopardy to the detriment of American interests and global progress. The U.S is now absent from major international forums including the most recent global health summit where leaders gathered to accelerate research and development of a COVID-19 vaccine.

President Biden and his cabinet have an opportunity – indeed an obligation – to reverse course and renew U.S. global leadership and partnership. America can and should be a champion of gender equality and girls' rights. It should return to showing leadership for refugees and can contribute to ending the conflict in Yemen that is causing children to starve to death and be killed by U.S.-made weapons. With just ten years left for the world to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, now is the time to provide robust investments in programs impacting children around the world, thus creating a more hopeful future for Americans as well.

To help address these urgent challenges, Save the Children has created “Prioritizing the World's Children: A Playbook for Leaders,” highlighting nine issues that need focused attention at all levels of government to ensure children in the U.S. and around the world are invested in and prioritized. Each essay contains concrete steps that leaders must address as soon as they are sworn in. At their core, none of these are partisan issues, they are human issues and shape the kind of world our children will inherit. The time to act is now.



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**“BUILD BACK
BETTER” IN THE
TIME OF COVID —
CREATING A
STRONGER,
HEALTHIER
WORLD**



“BUILD BACK BETTER” IN THE TIME OF COVID – CREATING A STRONGER, HEALTHIER WORLD

By Michael Klosson, Vice President, Policy and Humanitarian Response

While much attention will be rightly focused on how the U.S. recovers from COVID-19, the global nature of the pandemic has demonstrated that we are living in an extremely interconnected world and must focus on the fate of everyone around the world, especially our children. Global health knows no borders and Americans are equally vulnerable to threats from infectious diseases such as the current pandemic. Recent public surveys found that the majority of voters say stopping the global spread of COVID-19 should be a priority of the next U.S. President. Americans understand instinctively that unless we stop it everywhere, no one will be safe.

This global pandemic is not just a health crisis; it has been catastrophic to economies, food security and social safety nets. It has pushed at least 37 million more people into extreme poverty, threatens to increase hunger amongst an additional 130 million people, and has caused violence against women and girls to spike.

COVID-19 has put an entire generation of children at risk. More than 1.6 billion learners faced school closures at the peak due to the pandemic. Save the Children’s own analysis predicts that this unprecedented disruption to children’s education will result in at least 10 million children never returning to school, with girls, refugees, and internally displaced children most affected. According to a study by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, an additional 1.2 million children under five could die within six months due to interruptions in routine health services including suspended vaccination campaigns and rising malnutrition.

And as in America, some children are being hit harder than others. Girls and refugee children stand to suffer the most from the harmful impacts of COVID-19. Rohingya refugee children in Cox’s Bazaar and children living in war-torn Yemen already had difficulty accessing health services and continuing their studies prior to COVID-19. In a global survey conducted by Save the Children, a majority of girls reported being kept from schoolwork due to more household chores and caregiving responsibilities, which will make it harder for them to return to school. Girls are also at greater risk of gender-based violence and early marriage due to the economic strain of the pandemic.

Before this global pandemic, many in the international development community were celebrating forward progress and trying to figure out how to achieve ambitious goals such as ending extreme poverty, as agreed to in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a blueprint world leaders agreed to achieve a better, more sustainable future for all. Five years ago, the United States joined other world leaders, committing to the SDGs. U.S. foreign assistance has helped halve the number of young children and mothers dying in the last two decades, connected nearly 100 million more children to a quality education, and helped reduced levels of food insecurity in partner countries. The U.S. has encouraged other nations to develop plans to improve citizens’ health and well-being.

COVID-19 threatens to reverse decades of progress toward achieving this ambitious agenda, imperil U.S. development investments and generate greater insecurity in fragile countries. As the virus moves us backwards, away from a freer, fairer and more stable world, the United States must once again lead the way forward. The pandemic gives the U.S. an opportunity to think about how it can support countries’ own plans to “build back better” with an emphasis on empowering citizens to increasingly drive their own development and supporting countries to sustainably meet the needs of their people. In today’s interconnected world, it is critical for the U.S. to reestablish itself in the global arena, working to realize a better world for all – an outcome that will yield important outcomes for all Americans.

The Biden Administration must:

1 First, restore the international affairs budget to at least \$60 billion, and request robust resources to address health, economic, and social impacts of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable communities globally.

2 Second, engage with multilateral organizations to improve effectiveness, accountability, and transparency. This includes immediately rejoining World Health Organization and the global COVID vaccine facility, as well as partnerships such as the Open Government Partnership focused on effective governance.

3 Last, immediately nominate a committed, qualified leader for U.S. Agency for International Development as well as other health and development agencies and take steps to ensure their perspectives are weighed in our highest policy making councils.



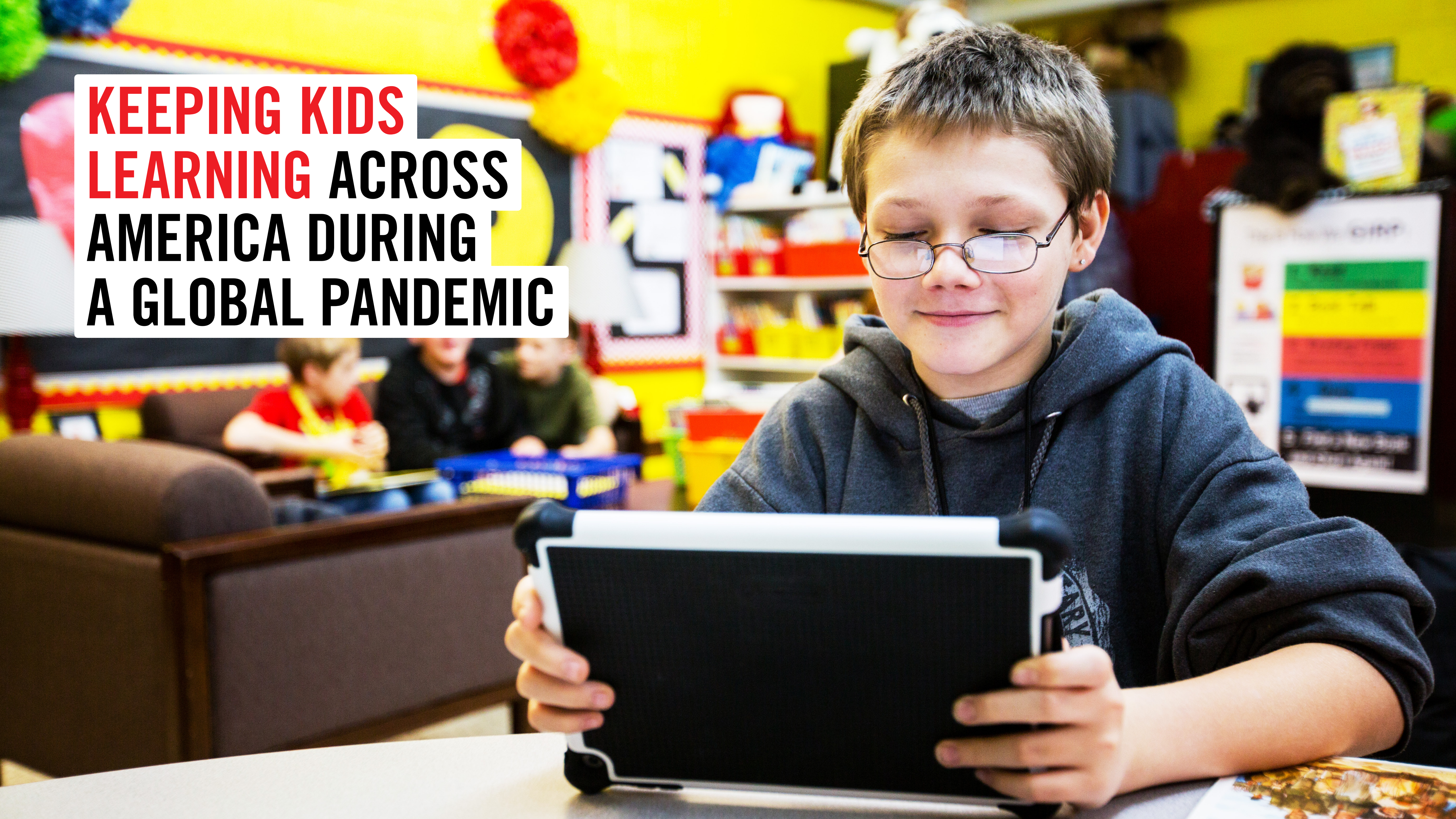
37M
MORE PEOPLE ARE
BELOW THE EXTREME
POVERTY LINE

130M
MORE PEOPLE
COULD FACE
FOOD INSECURITY

AT LEAST 10M
CHILDREN
MAY NEVER RETURN
TO SCHOOL

1.2M
MORE CHILDREN UNDER-FIVE
COULD DIE IN JUST SIX MONTHS
DUE TO REDUCTIONS IN
ROUTINE HEALTH SERVICES

**KEEPING KIDS
LEARNING ACROSS
AMERICA DURING
A GLOBAL PANDEMIC**



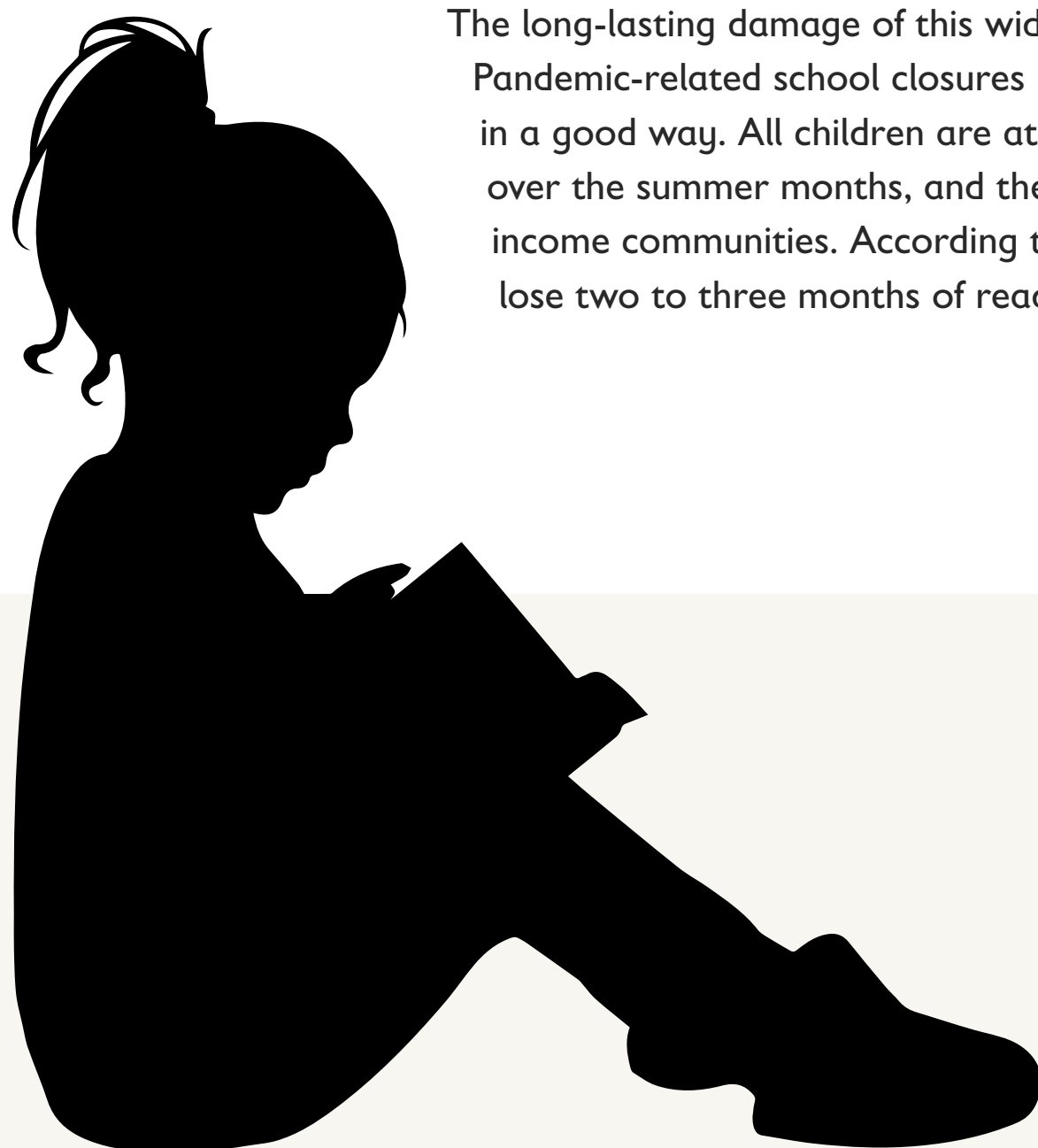
KEEPING KIDS LEARNING ACROSS AMERICA DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

By Shane Garver, Senior Director, U.S. Rural Education Programs

In late February and early March, schools across America began to shutter to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and keep children, families and communities safe. What began as isolated closures in a handful of school districts quickly ballooned into a nationwide shutdown. By the end of March 2020, nearly every U.S. public school was closed, leaving more than 55 million children from kindergarten through 12th grade at home. And closures were extended, and extended and extended. By mid-April, all states but Montana and Wyoming mandated statewide school closures through the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

This massive, sudden shift to remote, at-home learning had immediate effects on children and families alike. School districts scrambled to provide non-traditional instruction and deploy technology to keep kids connected and learning. Parents and caregivers juggled full-time work and homeschooling amid massive economic upheaval and a more than quadrupled unemployment rate. Plus, the digital divide became a significant barrier to equitable learning. In a study this summer, Common Sense Media revealed 16 million students lacked adequate internet or devices to sustain effective distance learning at home. Nearly **40 percent of affected children live in rural communities**, where internet connectivity and access – the rural digital divide – has long been a challenge.

The long-lasting damage of this widespread educational upheaval is equally troubling. Pandemic-related school closures made Summer 2020 the longest of children's lives, and not in a good way. All children are at risk of losing achievement gains made in the school year over the summer months, and the summer slide disproportionately affects children from low-income communities. According to the National Summer Learning Association, children can lose two to three months of reading progress each summer.



16M STUDENTS LACK ADEQUATE
INTERNET OR DEVICES
FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

Tennessee was the first state to quantify the impact of COVID-19 closures on early learners. The state's Department of Education projects an estimated **50 percent decrease in proficiency in third grade reading** – a major indicator for a child's success – and a projected **65 percent decrease in math proficiency**. I fear that these drops in student learning will prove true for elementary-aged children across America. Plus, the potential detriment to our global economy is very real. In September, economists estimated COVID-related learning loss shrinks the incomes of affected children by 3 percent over their lifetimes.

So, what will it take to catch children up?

1 First, focused, intentional investment in high-quality early education. Nobel Prize-winning economist Dr. James Heckman shows the rate of return on those investments can be 13 percent per child, per year, due to improved outcomes in education, health, sociability and economic productivity.

2 Second, a concerted effort must be made to support the health and well-being of children and the adults who care for them, from teachers to bus drivers, food service staff to school administrators.

3 And third, an unwavering commitment to ensure equitable learning for all children across America.

This next generation – and our shared future – is at stake.

**NOURISH
THE NATION
BY COMBATTING
CHILD HUNGER**



NOURISH THE NATION BY COMBATting CHILD HUNGER

By Tamara Sandberg, Advisor, U.S. Food Security and Nutrition

For more than a decade, child hunger in America was trending in a positive direction: down. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the number of households with children that reported struggling with food security was steadily decreasing since the Great Recession, dropping to a two-decade low of 13.6 percent in 2019. Alarming, child hunger has skyrocketed across the United States amid the COVID-19 pandemic. New research from Northwestern University underscores a heartbreaking reality. Since March, food insecurity rates have tripled for families with children across the nation and are disproportionately impacting Black and Hispanic families.

One child struggling with hunger is one too many. Before the pandemic closed schools, Save the Children supported kids through early education programs across rural America. Visits to these programs make clear that child hunger is pervasive in rural America. Pre-pandemic, nearly 90 percent of the nation's counties with the highest rates of child food insecurity were rural. In California's Central Valley, the Mississippi Delta, or in my backyard in Appalachia, kids often sprint off the school bus in the morning, making a beeline to the cafeteria for the free breakfast served at school. Getting nutritious meals to children outside school buildings proved one of the biggest challenges to overcome during widespread school closures this spring.

Organizations including Save the Children, food banks, and community and faith-based groups rose to the occasion and worked tirelessly to meet the urgent need of hungry kids. In fact, Save the Children helped prepare and deliver nearly 9 million meals across rural America since schools were shuttered to ensure kids weren't missing out. That number continues to grow as remote and hybrid learning models carry on during the pandemic.



ONE CHILD STRUGGLING WITH HUNGER IS ONE TOO MANY

But we can't rely on nonprofits and generous individuals alone to fill the food gap. Specific, focused investment at the federal and state level is essential to ensure children do not continue to go hungry. The federal government must approve a 15 percent boost in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and increase the minimum monthly benefit to \$30 as part of the solution. We need Congress to take action and put resources directly and immediately into American's wallets. Every SNAP dollar spent generates about \$1.54 in economic activity, so this investment helps local communities and economies, too.

SNAP is critical for helping children grow and helps break the cycle of poverty. Meeting children's basic nutritional needs helps ensure they are healthier and better able to succeed in school. When children grow up smarter, stronger and healthier, our nation is smarter, stronger and healthier, too. Elected officials, please join us in strengthening our children's futures. We need your leadership and commitment to ensure every child has a strong, healthy life.

FOOD INSECURITY RATES HAVE **TRIPLED** FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN SINCE MARCH



PRESERVING
THE PLANET
FOR OUR
CHILDREN

PRESERVING THE PLANET FOR OUR CHILDREN

By Sultan Latif, *Director, Humanitarian Climate Crisis Unit*

Wildfires rage through west coast cities and forests, eerily reddening skies. Simultaneous hurricanes and tropical storms batter the Gulf of Mexico and the eastern seaboard, ravaging coastal communities. And this is just in the continental United States. Other countries are suffering from severe droughts, extreme heat, flash floods, and more. The world has shifted from climate change to climate crisis.

The climate crisis hurts us today in a myriad of ways. Children are particularly vulnerable to its effects, and as adults, they will bear the burden of accelerating harm to our planet.

During the worst of this year's wildfire season, Portland and San Francisco recorded the worst air quality in the world. In total, more than 5 million acres of land burned. The wildfires have traumatized countless families with the loss of lives, livelihoods, and property. Such disasters dramatically alter children's daily lives, keeping them from school, trapping them indoors, or forcing them to endure unhealthy air.

Similarly, more frequent and powerful hurricanes and cyclones displace families, destroy schools, and can even separate children from caregivers. Save the Children focuses its response efforts on supporting kids in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, getting them back in school and childcare as soon as possible, and training caregivers and teachers to support children's social and emotional recovery. We take this holistic approach because extreme weather events impact all aspects of children's lives.

The impacts of climate change are not felt equally, with people in developing countries often bearing the worst impacts. Climate change can cause droughts and flooding that drive food insecurity; women and girls can be particularly hard hit as scarce food resources are often prioritized for men and boys. Further, women subsistence farmers in Africa are less likely to be able to access credit, land ownership, or other assets that will help them better adapt their farming efforts to be resilient to climate change. The subsequent devastation to economies, livelihoods, food security, and health are denying children around the world the safety and well-being they are entitled to. As climate change intensifies, today's children are destined to welcome their own sons and daughters into even more unstable and threatening conditions.

We must make meaningful changes or things will only get worse.

How can our leaders reverse this alarming momentum?

1 First, the U.S. must rejoin the Paris Agreement. In 2015, the U.S. Government signed the international agreement to reduce global temperature rise and curb the effects of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. While the Paris Agreement is not the only solution, it does give children a fighting chance of protecting our planet.


2 Second, the federal government must reassess all environmental regulations that have been altered or adjusted in the last four years. A tremendous number of climate-protections have been weakened or replaced since 2016. For example, the Clean Power Plan, which set emission limits on high-polluting power plants, was replaced by the drastically scaled-back Affordable Clean Energy rule.

In addition, the U.S. Government must take action to help mitigate the worst impacts of the climate crisis as it is already impacting children.

3 The U.S. Government should support the Green Climate Fund, including support to mitigate the worst impacts on climate on children around the world.

4 USAID should ensure that all programming on humanitarian crises, resilience, and food security integrate strong gender and climate analysis and include targeted programs to mitigate the immediate and long-term impacts of climate change on children and families.

Our planet is in peril. The government must act now. America must be a climate leader, not a laggard—our children's futures depend on it.



AS CLIMATE CHANGE INTENSIFIES, TODAY'S CHILDREN ARE DESTINED TO WELCOME THEIR OWN SONS AND DAUGHTERS INTO EVEN MORE UNSTABLE AND THREATENING CONDITIONS.

CHILD CARE:
ESSENTIAL TO
THE U.S. ECONOMY



CHILD CARE: ESSENTIAL TO THE U.S. ECONOMY

By Mark Shriver, Senior Vice President of U.S. Programs and Advocacy
President, Save the Children Action Network (SCAN)

America's long-term economic recovery depends upon the federal government prioritizing child care industry. Only when our nation's children return to safe, high-quality educational settings that promote their successful development can millions of parents get back to work.

COVID-19 has placed an already fragile industry in an increasingly dire situation. Before the pandemic, access to child care was already out of reach for many families due to exorbitant costs or lack of availability. And, despite the substantial cost to parents, the child care workforce was underpaid, with a majority of workers relying on some form of public assistance for support. COVID-19 has put unimaginable stresses on an industry that was already struggling.

Since the outbreak, around **one-third of child care providers have closed, average enrollment is down by 67 percent, and provider costs have almost doubled.** The consequences have already devastated the industry, with approximately 200,000 jobs – 20 percent of the entire industry—lost nationwide. And, the projections for the future are just as catastrophic, with estimates suggesting 4.5 million child care slots could be lost forever.

Families, children and the broader economy are feeling the pandemic's effect on the child care industry as well. Thirteen percent of working parents have lost a job or have had to reduce working hours due to a lack of child care and **1 in 4 parents have reported worsening mental health in their children.** And this economic hardship disproportionately hurts people of color.



Women of color make up 40 percent of child care workers, while parents of color are less likely to have the work flexibility and financial resources to cope with widespread closures.

Our leaders in Washington must work together to adopt legislation that provides significant investment to stabilize this critical industry before it's too late.

First, immediate relief should be prioritized in order to prevent the additional loss of child care slots and growing child care deserts by offering direct financial support to providers during a time of lower enrollment and higher costs. An example of such relief is the bipartisan Child Care is Essential Act, which would include \$50 billion in stabilization grants for providers.

Second, lawmakers must create legislation that promotes long-term financial investment in the child care industry. Models include the bipartisan Child Care Workforce and Facilities Act, which would provide funding to states to expand child care and invest in its workforce as well as the Rebuilding a Better Child Care Infrastructure Act, which would increase mandatory funding and provide funds over a two-year period to increase access and quality.

It's clear. Reliable, accessible, sustainable child care is in the interest of every American. Not only does quality child care give children the best possible start in life, setting them on a path to success, but it empowers working parents to fully contribute, enabling our economy to thrive. Child care is essential to our shared future. We must treat it as such.

1 IN 3
OF CHILD CARE
PROVIDERS HAVE
CLOSED

200K
JOBS LOST
NATIONWIDE

4.5M
CHILD CARE SLOTS
COULD BE LOST
FOREVER

13%
OF PARENTS
HAVE LOST A JOB
OR HAVE HAD TO REDUCE WORKING HOURS
DUE TO A LACK OF CHILD CARE

**IMMIGRANT
CHILDREN
DESERVE
BETTER**



IMMIGRANT CHILDREN DESERVE BETTER

By Betsy Zorio, Vice President, U.S. Programs and Advocacy

Systemic violence, gang warfare and deep-rooted poverty and corruption around the globe have forced tens of thousands of children and families to undertake dangerous journeys to the United States in search of protection.

Our nation has long served as a safe harbor for persecuted people, but the past four years have eroded that proud legacy. The government's sharply anti-immigrant policies have specifically targeted children and families seeking refuge. We have witnessed harmful federal government actions, such as separating children from their families – resulting in **545 children with missing parents** – and incarcerating toddler children in order to frighten and deter fellow migrants and asylum seekers.

Unfortunately, these cruel policies persist, even in the midst of COVID-19, putting even more children at risk. The pandemic has been used as a pretext to expand anti-immigrant policies and close the U.S. southern border to children and families fleeing violence. Thousands of children have been expelled from our country without due process or regard for their health and safety. Shamefully, the U.S. immigration system now delivers punishment, rather than protection. Immigrant children – the most vulnerable of all – have suffered most.

We believe the U.S. immigration system should recognize immigrant children first and foremost as children. Children are different from adults, and should be protected by policies and procedures that take their unique needs into account. Looking ahead to the next four years, there are five recommendations our nation should consider to ensure immigrant children are treated humanely.

First, a White House coordinator on immigrant children should be appointed to demonstrate our country's commitment to protecting the safety and well-being of immigrant children. In the same spirit, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Unaccompanied Children should be re-established to coordinate child-friendly standards across relevant agencies.

Second, the President should issue an Executive Order mandating that government officials consider the best interest of children in all immigration policy decisions and support legislation to codify that mandate through federal law.

Third, U.S. financial assistance to Central American countries should be restored in addition to promoting targeted aid programs in Northern Triangle countries of origin – El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras – to address the root causes of unsafe migration. The U.S. must collaborate with transit countries to ensure humanitarian protection and support are provided to children on the move.

Fourth, children should not be detained in prison-like confinement. Instead, we should promote the use of effective, compassionate alternatives to detention that preserve family unity and avoid traumatizing young children.

Lastly, family separation must stop immediately and significant efforts must be made to reunite every single separated child with their parents. We cannot let hundreds of children live the rest of their lives without their parents because our government did not implement a system capable of reuniting them.

Children – no matter where they are from – deserve to be safe. A new year offers our nation the opportunity to rebuild a stronger, child-centric asylum and immigration system, and to correct past wrongs. Such actions will create a stronger, kinder America for generations to come.



SHAMEFULLY, THE U.S. IMMIGRATION SYSTEM NOW DELIVERS PUNISHMENT, RATHER THAN PROTECTION.

REFUGEES
CAN REBUILD —
WITH OUR
HELP



REFUGEES CAN REBUILD — WITH OUR HELP

By Bernice Romero, Senior Director, Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy

The United States has long been a leader in resettling refugees. We demonstrate our best as a nation, uphold our values, and lead by example when we welcome refugees. But this legacy is fast eroding.

Twenty six million men, women, and children have been forced to flee their home countries due to conflict and persecution—more than at any time in history. This is a number so large, if it were a U.S. state, it would be the third most populous. Half of these refugees are children.

As the new Administration takes office, it should take four actions to improve the lives of people who urgently need help:

1 First, increase the number of refugees admitted into the U.S. to 125,000. The United States is a country founded and made great by the creativity, intellect, and hard work of refugees and immigrants. It can demonstrate global leadership and regain its status as the country that welcomes the most refugees by increasing refugee admissions to 125,000 per year. It must also reverse the changes to regulations, case law, and security requirements that have dramatically reduced eligibility for resettlement. Doing so would allow tens of thousands of children a safe place to be healthy, protected, and educated, and open the door to a better future for them and their families.

2 Second, work with Congress to establish the first federally mandated refugee admissions floor. Less than one percent of all refugees are ever able to resettle and find a new life in safety and security. That strains developing countries' limited resources and denies children an opportunity for full-time schooling and a permanent home. Legislating a refugee admissions floor will ensure the lives and futures of some of the most vulnerable people on earth are not held hostage to politics of the day.

3 Third, ensure justice and accountability for crimes committed against civilians in conflict areas, including grave violations against children. For far too long, states and armed non-state actors have failed to uphold standards in their own or others' conduct. Governments have done little to punish violators for their crimes. In some cases, like the horrific attacks against the Rohingya that forced more than 700,000 people from their homes in 2017, the U.S. Government should place additional targeted sanction both individuals and military-owned companies complicit in atrocities. In other instances, like Syria, the U.S. Government should continue to call out violations of international humanitarian law. A clear message must be sent that crimes against civilians will not be tolerated.

4 Lastly, prioritize access to quality education for refugee children. At least 3.7 million refugee children are out of school, a figure likely worsened by the COVID pandemic. Research from the UN Refugee Agency and the Malala Fund shows that half of all refugee girls in school will not return when classrooms reopen. Governments and other actors must include refugee children in national education systems. Education is a lifesaving intervention that reduces vulnerability to physical and sexual violence, exploitation, trafficking, and forced work, and damage to emotional and mental health. The Global Compact on Refugees, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2018, commits resources and efforts to ensure that all refugee children are in school ideally within three months of arrival in a host country. Now is time to fulfill this ambition. The U.S. must renew its commitment to the Compact. Future generations depend on it.



**26^M MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN
HAVE BEEN FORCED TO FLEE THEIR
HOME COUNTRIES DUE TO CONFLICT AND PERSECUTION**

**A FREER, FAIRER
WORLD DEMANDS
EQUAL RIGHTS FOR
WOMEN AND GIRLS**



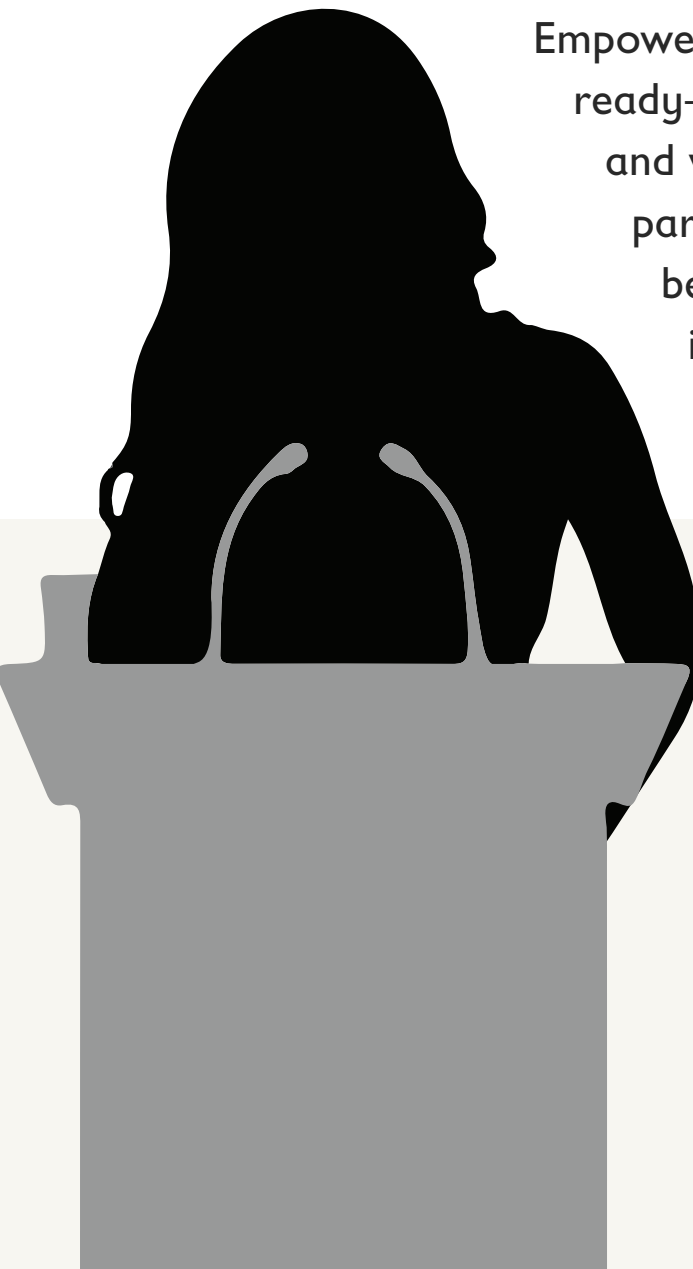
A FREER, FAIRER WORLD DEMANDS EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

By Nora O'Connell, Vice President, Public Policy and Advocacy

America was built on the ideal of equality. As our nation has strived to build that more perfect union at home, those efforts have also inspired advancements in gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment around the world. U.S. investments in gender equality and girls' rights around the world are critical to not only creating a more just and equal world; they are also critical to achieving U.S. foreign policy objectives, strengthening global stability, achieving universal human rights, and increasing economic opportunities abroad and at home.

Girls the world over struggle to succeed, despite violence and discrimination. Many face barriers to growing up healthy, educated, and protected, preventing them from reaching their full potential. Early evidence and expert projections show that COVID-19 is making women and girls even more vulnerable due to spikes in gender-based violence across the globe. COVID-19-closures and lockdowns are isolating women and children with abusers, cutting them off from formal and informal protection systems. Such containment measures are also increasing economic insecurity and food and water shortages.

Save the Children now estimates that the economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 alone could put an additional 500,000 girls at risk of child marriage this year. An additional 2.5 million girls will be at risk of child marriage over the next five years—potentially reversing 25 years of progress toward ending this exploitative practice. Many will not return to school.



Empowered girls become empowered women. Every woman—when she is ready—deserves an opportunity to choose if, and when, she marries. Girls and women controlling their own destinies helps increase women's political participation, making governments more stable, responsive to citizens, better able to achieve peace. Moreover, when adolescent girls are active in civic spaces, they become drivers of positive change now and in the future.

Empowering women makes financial sense, too. Gender balanced workplaces could double global GDP growth by 2025. A 2017 World Bank study found that global gains from ending child marriage could reach more than \$500 billion per year, and the benefits of ending all adolescent childbirth could exceed \$700 billion per year by 2030.

We urge the new Administration in its first 100 days of office to prioritize the following key actions:

1 First, launch a global adolescent girls' initiative that addresses unique risks to girls such as gender-based violence and loss of education as well as advances girls' leadership and political participation as well as economic opportunity. Support passage of the Girls LEAD Act to ensure the sustainability of these investments.

2 Second, develop a state-of-the-art Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and strengthen gender program staffing, analysis, and program data collection across all USAID bureaus and missions.

3 Third, request authorization of significant funding for advancing gender equality globally as part of a robust funding request for international assistance in the President's Budget Request.

Lastly, demonstrate U.S. leadership in the international community on gender equality and girls' rights with high-level leadership at the global "Generation Equality Forum" focusing on women's and girls' rights, and making strong commitments to ending child marriage and investing in adolescent girls in the resulting five-year action plan.

**WHEN ADOLESCENT GIRLS ARE ACTIVE IN CIVIC SPACES,
THEY BECOME DRIVERS OF POSITIVE CHANGE
NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.**

**PEACE
IS POSSIBLE
FOR YEMEN**



PEACE IS POSSIBLE FOR YEMEN

By Greg Ramm, Vice President, Humanitarian Response

When the President is inaugurated in January, 80 percent of people in Yemen—including 12 million children—will likely need urgent humanitarian aid. That is equivalent to more than all the residents of Florida struggling to survive. Yemeni suffering is the result of a deadly six-year conflict, multiple health crises, and a failing economy, constituting the world’s worst humanitarian emergency. COVID-19 has only exacerbated the crisis. The United States did not cause this conflict, but the Administration and Congress should take three immediate steps to stop the suffering and promote peace.

First, suspend arms sales. The United States has sold billions in weapons to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, two of the principal parties to this conflict. This is despite clear evidence that U.S. weapons used in strikes in Yemen have killed children and other civilians. Congress has voted in a bipartisan manner to suspend arms sales and transfers to help reduce violence there, but these actions have been vetoed by the White House. As Yemen faces the threat of famine and COVID-19, now is the moment to redouble efforts. The U.S. Government should suspend weapons sales and transfers to any party to the conflict in Yemen, as long as a substantial risk remains that such arms could be used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law. It should encourage allies to do the same.

Second, end the aid suspension. Humanitarian and development programs help babies who are dying of painful malnutrition, allow children to attend school, prevent health system collapse, and provide sanitation and hygiene services in a country where nearly 70% of people do not have access to clean water. However, reduced funding jeopardizes these critical programs. Tens of thousands of children in Yemen are missing out on life-saving treatment for severe malnutrition due to funding shortfalls, including the U.S. government’s aid suspension in northern Yemen. While aid diversion should not be tolerated, a unilateral, wide-reaching aid suspension is not the answer, particularly in the middle of a pandemic. Humanitarian organizations, including Save the Children, have demonstrated that they operate in a principled manner that ensures aid reaches children and families who need it. The United States should pause only specific aid programs that cannot be delivered in accordance with humanitarian principles.

Lastly, press for peace. Suspending arms sales and ending the aid suspension are vitally important, but the lasting solution for Yemen is peace. The U.S. should use all diplomatic means to support the ongoing peace process and reflect the concerns of women and children. Parties to the conflict should protect civilians, stabilize the economy, and allow humanitarian and commercial goods to reach Yemen. The U.S. should also refrain from taking any other policy steps that might politicize the delivery of humanitarian assistance or complicate efforts to bring the parties to the negotiating table.

The willful blindness of the international community to solving this crisis, when the problems and solutions are clearly in front of us, is completely unjustified. The United States must do everything in its power to protect and support Yemeni children and families, hold perpetrators of harm to account, and help set Yemen on the road to recovery.



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