

# ***Ten Strategies for Impoverished Communities:***

*A Health Justice Approach V 1.0*



# A Health Justice Approach

## V 1.0

### **Introduction**

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global threat that requires a well-orchestrated response. But especially because there is no vaccine or cure, the response is about much more than the disease. Like all disasters, Covid-19 reveals how the fabric of society, with all of its injustice, prejudice and stigma, bestows advantage on some groups and greater harm on others. Covid-19, because of the global reach of the pandemic, reveals these issues on an unprecedented scale. At the global level we see the West tapping financial reserves to keep economies intact while the Global South, with far less fiscal capacity, falls further behind economically. Decades of work reducing poverty is being undone and economic capacity, after decades of progress, is being degraded.

The consequences of this pandemic and the underlying injustice are especially destructive to the most impoverished among us. The resources to withstand the virus and apply the mitigation methods and generally limited or non-existent in impoverished communities. This means we must be especially attentive to the needs of the community, developing special strategies and countering the harm that accompanies some mitigation methods.

### **How to Use this Toolkit**

This toolkit organizes strategies to help impoverished communities. It introduces ten useful strategies to respond to the various issues that are linked to injustice. The strategies are briefly explained, and then links are provided for more detailed resources.

One way to think of this toolkit is to see it as a sample of resources available on many websites. We have organized and described the resources around a set of important topics so you do not have to search for them. Each topic is introduced followed by links to resources.

Resources are being released constantly and we will update this guide as more become available.

## **1. Promote Health Justice**

According to the World Bank<sup>1</sup> the Covid-19 pandemic will likely decimate poor communities. The effects include immediate health threats, long term threats from malnutrition, loss of livelihood, and economic loss that will potentially put a half billion additional people below the poverty line. In recognition of this threat, the WEA recommends a health justice framework<sup>2</sup> to

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/how-would-you-distribute-covid-response-funds-poor-countries>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20200319.757883/full/>

combating Covid-19. A health justice framework recognizes that vulnerable communities will suffer far greater near term and long-term consequences from the pandemic. It further recognizes that impoverished communities are the most vulnerable of all, and therefore require different strategies and increased resources.

A health justice framework is guided by three principles. First, address the social determinants that lead to social, health and economic vulnerability. Second, contextualize strategies so that they are accompanied by modifications and supports that offset the burden created by generalized mitigation policies and strategies. Third, address the root problems that give rise to the current crisis.

The WEA Working Group on Impoverished Communities has identified ten strategies for working with impoverished communities that reflect a health justice framework. These strategies are summarized below followed by more detailed descriptions for action.

### **Why is This Strategy Important?**

Responding to a crisis means mobilizing people and resources, not only for the immediate need but also for the much longer process of recovery. People are engaged when they see a mission as connected to their beliefs and values. Churches are mobilized when they understand that the response is part of the mission of the church. This is especially important in order to have a faithful, long term response. Health justice is a framework that shows how the actions are linked to the role of the church in addressing injustice.

### **Resources:**

[A Call to Commitment and Partnership: A World Evangelical Alliance Brief on the Evangelical Community and Humanitarian Development](#)

[What Martin Luther Teaches Us About Coronavirus](#)

[A Christian Perspective on Covid-19](#)

## **2. Contextualize Strategies and Recommendations**

The standard mitigation guidelines may themselves put people at risk. Cramped, often poorly-ventilated dwellings housing large numbers of people are potential petri dishes for COVID-19. Queuing to use shared toilets or draw water from wells or boreholes, using crowded public transport, or simply walking past others in narrow lanes heighten the risk of exposure.<sup>3</sup>

If informal settlements are locked down and their inhabitants lose access to work, food, and other essentials, there will be a risk not only of the coronavirus ravaging communities that contain large numbers of individuals who are vulnerable to its most serious effects, but of exacerbating malnutrition, increasing the risk of other diseases and plunging millions of people into – or further into – long-term poverty.

A public health crisis such as Covid-19 depends on effective communication and engaging the public in following recommendations aimed at containing the spread of the virus (You may see the acronym RCCE – Risk Communication Community Engagement). What is effective and engaging in one community may not be the same for another community. Adapting messages to the community requires contextualization.

Communicating effective information starts with making sure you are communicating reliable and authoritative information, and distinguishing it from the misinformation currently flooding social media.

### **Community Participation**

Use your knowledge of members of the community to recruit representatives to contribute to your messages. Community participation should emphasize the following:

- How do members of the community prefer to get their information?
- Who are the most influential members of the community? Can they be recruited to support your message?
- Consider the skills, resources and support that may be needed to do what you are asking people to do. Are there barriers, needs, or cultural practices that might make action difficult for community members?
- Are there competing messages? Is there any information spreading among the community that might conflict with your message?

### **Social Structures**

Social structure refers to the classes and groupings in society. In communicating health messages, you will want to consider differences between groups in the society that can influence their receptiveness to your message and differences in ability to act on recommendations. For example, in one city, recommendations to be vaccinated had different impacts depending on social class. People with more education trusted health messages and were likely to be vaccinated. People with less education also had a history of poor experiences with the health system and were disposed to be less trusting of the message. As a result, one group received better protection from illness while the other group had more illness and the suffered the related economic and other consequences.

## **Communication Channels**

Channels refers to the way people get their information. Most people are familiar with technical channels like WhatsApp, Zoom, Facebook, etc. These are all important, but they are not the only important channels. Some channels are related to group membership. When a pastor speaks from the pulpit that is a communication channel important to the members of the congregation. Most people are influenced by conversations with people like themselves and people they would like to be like. Workers may be influenced by other workers, especially successful ones. Most people are influenced by peers they trust and respect. Finding people looked up to and having them support your message can be important to have your message accepted. Combining and influential community members with other channels, like social media, can be both effective and efficient.

## **Understand the Cultural and Historical Context**

Every community has a cultural context and an historical context. In the response to the Ebola outbreak in Western Africa and later in DRC, interventions were compromised by cultural burial practices that included physical contact with the deceased. It was further complicated by a historical context of exploitation by people from the West which made it easy to believe rumors that Ebola was perpetrated by the West in order to profit financially. Only when these cultural and contextual factors were included in strategies was there significant progress against Ebola.

## **Why is the Strategy Important?**

Programs, models, and strategies are often developed in one setting and imported to another. In order to be put to the best use they need to be adapted to the skills, resources, and other capacities on the local community (asset mapping is an important part of this contextualizing process).

## **Resources**

[Echoes of Ebola: social and political warnings for the COVID-19 response in African settings](#)

## **3. Engage Local Faith Leaders in Delivering Key Messages**

One of the first challenges for Alliances and others working nationally is to engage church leaders. We offer the following suggestions:

- Do not expect to get everyone. Start with those that are willing and build from there by sharing what you are doing. You can identify the “willing” by looking for those already engaged in serving their communities in some way.

- People are engaged when what you ask them to do connects with their faith. That means answering the question of how responding to Covid is a demonstration of faith. There are numerous ways to respond to this. For example:
  - Using the health justice framework, discuss how our God is a God of justice and expects us to seek justice for others. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a parable about justice, and restoring an injured person is a key way to act with compassion and justice.
  - The church is an important source of truth, including truth about the pandemic. Building trust and speaking truth are two of the ways that the church and people of faith are the salt of the earth. Salt is not just about presence, it is about the way our presence impacts those around us.
- Provide guidance on confronting misinformation and bad theology. (See Stigma)
- Shall tools, like this guide and resources listed here. Invite reflection, prayer, and discussion. Emphasize the tools as a starting point for considering local needs and not something to be rigidly implemented.

### **Why is This Important?**

Engaging local faith leaders may seem obvious, but it can be one of the more challenging tasks in creating a community response, as well as one of the most important. A crisis is often a time when misinformation and destructive rumors abound. As trusted community leaders, pastors have an essential role in countering misinformation with truth.

### **Resources**

A Covid-19 Theology FAQ (WEA)

[Address Rumor and Misinformation](#) (Tear Fund)

[Covid-19: Guidance for Faith Communities and Places of Worship](#) (World Vision)

[Covid-19 Guidance for the Local Church](#) (Tear Fund)

[Preparing Your Church for Covid-19](#) (Wheaton College HDI)

## **4. Aim for Modest Restrictions**

Policies that aim to eliminate COVID-19 transmission may be so draconian that all other activities must cease. For households that only bring in enough income each day to buy a day's supply of food, the risks of such confinement will be impossible to bear for long.

But while mass self-isolation may be undesirable, more limited containment measures can help reduce transmission. Banning large gatherings at weddings and funerals; persuading religious leaders to postpone services, or at least to hold them outdoors or stagger them to reduce attendance; closing video halls and bars (perhaps allowing the latter to sell take-outs only); and educating people to stand as far as possible apart while queuing are obvious first steps.

Temporary measures to isolate cohorts of people – whereby individuals group themselves into the smallest possible unit that can provide each member with essential provisions and services – can also slow transmission. In Europe, the predominant cohort unit is the household, but in informal settlements it might encompass a house, a compound, a street, a block or even a district or village.

Such cohort units could assign specific dwellings for those at high risk of COVID-19 infection (a measure known as targeted quarantining), those who are infected and in need of care, and those who have to leave the unit to work. They could also develop rotation systems to reduce the number of members who go out to the market or to fetch water, dispose of sewage, collect mobile payments, or use public transport.

The number of entry points to these units should be minimized – in Brazil, gangs have placed soap by public water fountains at the entrance to favelas, with signs urging those who enter to wash their hands – while outdoor areas can be assigned for limited numbers of outsiders to visit relatives inside the unit, as well as for unit meetings to be held. With larger units, such as whole villages, travel between them should be prohibited except in emergencies, while mobile food distribution points can serve those that struggle to sustain themselves. In both cases, when a member falls sick the entire unit should self-isolate for 14 days, with food, water, and sewage services provided from outside.

## **Resources**

At this time there is no specific guidance on modest restrictions, but the guidance on easing the lockdown restrictions is similar and provides useful guidance. Local actions appear to emphasize weighing the impact on various groups to determine when restrictions create other harmful impacts or lead to major civil unrest.

WHO Guidance on Easing Covid-19 Restrictions <http://www.euro.who.int/en/countries/ukraine/news/news/2020/4/who-europe-publishes-considerations-for-gradual-easing-of-covid-19-measures>

CDC Guidance on Reopening <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/php/CDC-Activities-Initiatives-for-COVID-19-Response.pdf>

## **5. Prioritize the Most Vulnerable**

The importance of prioritizing impoverished communities when intervening in the pandemic is based on two observations: the far greater risk of near term and long-term loss for people in impoverished communities, and the variety of social, economic and other consequences for some groups that require special attention. For example:

- Detention of immigrants places them at increased risk. Advocate for the protection of immigrants and an end to detention.
- As communities and homes are disrupted by lockdown, illness, and economic upheaval, certain groups are more vulnerable to all forms of violence, especially children and women. Efforts to protect them should be increased. Churches have a role to play in monitoring vulnerable groups in their communities. This should include:
  - Include women and girls in planning the location of handwashing facilities
  - Maintain vigilance for violence
  - Seek regular feedback from vulnerable people in order to detect new threats and/or improve current actions

One approach to protection of the vulnerable is to form a community network where community leaders are educated about risks and possible actions when harm is detected. A community network can operate similar to a community health partnership where faith leaders partner with government agencies responsible for community protection and NGOs working in the community. See the Community Partnership Guide for more specific directions.

### **Why is this Important?**

The burden of the pandemic and the mitigation strategies does not weigh equally on all people, it burdens the vulnerable far more than those with resources. Women, children, the disabled, the chronically ill, and the elderly top the list of the most vulnerable. Their needs should be given priority attention given the lack of other resources and options for this group.

### **Resources**

[How to Tackle Coronavirus in Slums](#)

[Covid 19 and Immigration Detention: What Can Governments and Stakeholders Do?](#)



## **6. Engage Young People**

Several initiatives around the world include various methods for engaging young people. Examples include:

- Discipleship. A crisis is an opportunity to train a new generation of leaders. This is especially true of the current crisis where the lockdown has imposed a significant burden on the local church. The lockdown forces the distribution of the church into homes and local small groups, which also prevents a church leader from serving in the traditional church centered approach. Distributing the church is an opportunity for many people to step into leadership roles serving small groups of worshippers, with the main pastor serving in a mentoring and discipleship role.
- The younger generation is, generally, more conversant with technology and social media. This suggests important contributions related to making use of technology. For example, young people can be given guidance on detecting misinformation on social media and responding with accurate information. They can be organized into a technical support team, helping people who are unfamiliar with technology.
- Youth can be the most effective messenger for reaching other youth. All of us are more likely to be influenced by our peers, and this is no less true for young people. Young people can be engaged with meaningful ministry roles that include reaching out to and supporting other youth.

### **Why is this Important?**

It should be obvious as it is often said that young people are the future. A crisis exposes weakness but also creates opportunities. One of those opportunities is to mentor and equip youth.

### **Resources**

[Risk Communication & Community Engagement: Practical Tips on Engaging Adolescents and Youth in the COVID-19 Response](#)

[How to Talk to Children About Coronavirus](#)

Ten Strategies for Impoverished Communities

## **7. Teach Hand Sanitation Options without Soap**

Some people in low-income communities cannot afford soap and use ash or soil instead. Ash or soil may be more effective than water alone, but may be less effective than soap. One concern is that if the soil or ash is contaminated with microorganisms it may increase the spread of disease rather than decrease it. Like soap, ash is also a disinfecting agent because in contact with water, it forms an alkaline solution. WHO recommended ash or sand as an alternative to soap when soap is not available (WHO, 2014).

### **Why this is Important?**

Clearly, low water situations are very challenging and need practical alternatives to the standard advice on hand washing.

### **Resources**

[UN Water](#)

[WHO Handwashing Guide](#)

[Hand Washing, Hygiene and Diapering](#)

## **8. Use Modified Physical Distancing**

The risk of Covid-19 infection at shared water points is possible through not maintaining sufficient social distancing, and by handling of surfaces at the water point (pump handles, taps and valves, buckets, ropes, etc.). In both cases, we recommend that wherever possible well-protected staff (wearing Personal Protective Equipment, PPE) oversee the fetching of water, by maintaining minimal social distancing rules at the water point, and by using a disinfectant spray on surfaces evidenced to be handled by users. Maintaining social distancing (2m apart minimum), and an orderliness in access (e.g. one person at a time, filling one vessel of no more than 20 litres), will go some way to maintaining calm and reducing conflict at the water site.

### **Resources**

[Strategies for Physical Distancing](#) (Some of these can be adapted for churches as they reopen)

## **9. Identify and Mobilize Local Resources (Building a Better Community)**

Past disaster experience is not a reliable guide to how to respond to Covid-19. In the past disasters were contained geographically and the global community, which was largely spared from disaster, could mobilize their fiscal capacity to support those impacted by disaster. In this global pandemic national fiscal resources are mobilized by countries to sustain their own economies, leaving little capacity to distribute to others. This is true of foundations that have been hurt by the economic decline, as well as governments and many of all but the wealthiest private donors. This makes identifying and making efficient use of local resources more important than ever.

### **Asset Mapping**

Asset mapping as part of a process to fight Covid-19 in informal settlements provides the community with an opportunity to discover the assets (strengths, skills, people, organizations etc) that can be utilized to be part of the solutions needed at this particular time.

For NGOs and communities to fully engage with asset mapping there needs to be 3 significant shifts in thinking:

- A change from seeing people who need help to seeing people who have value, contribution and agency
- A change from seeing deficits to seeing possibilities
- A change from seeing simple cause and effect to recognizing our communities are complex systems

Specifically, for the purpose of fighting Covid-19 a process of asset mapping could look like this:

- Gather a group
- Design a strategy
- Answer the question who or what does your community have that can help you work your strategy
- Monitoring and adjusting (action / reflection)

Finally, this approach can be adopted post Covid-19 and become part of a broader community led approach to development.

### **Resources**

Asset Mapping for Informal Settlements: An approach to mitigating the effects of Covid-19 (Centre For Building Better Community)

[Community Mapping and Mobilization](#)

## **10.Mitigate Stigma**

Fear not only brings out the risk of blaming others for the crisis, it also brings out existing divisions and prejudices between people. This can appear as stigmatizing people in a way that makes them targets for the anger and fear felt by others. People who are stigmatized not only face possible maltreatment and violence, they also experience greater emotional distress, trauma, and other harmful effects from the crisis.

Churches should first be aware of possible stigmatizing statements coming from their own or other churches. Statements that attack, blame, or place fault on other groups contribute to an environment of stigmatizing that can carry over to groups beyond the initial target.

When countering stigma it is important to act quickly. Stay alert for the first signs of blaming others and quickly counter those statements before they are picked up and repeated by others. Treat stigmatizing statements like a virus that needs to be contained before it spreads and becomes a pandemic.

Stigma is especially troubling during a pandemic. In some communities the fear of being stigmatized will cause people to not participate in efforts to contain the virus. They may avoid testing, they may avoid treatment even if ill, and they refuse to participate in quarantine or tracking efforts. These fears can be countered by a clear and public message in support of stigmatized groups.

World Vision provides useful Do's and Don'ts on dealing with stigma (below).

### **Resources**

[Mitigating Stigma and Fear](#)

[WHO Guide to Countering Stigma](#)