



The Peacebuilders

"Keeping the ICF Circle informed; Connecting with Community of Interreligious Peacebuilders"

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From the Editor's Desk: Keeping the Faith . . . This too, shall pass!

ICF Reconfigures Program Plans

Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro
ICF Coordinator

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to linger. Hong Kong is now in the stage of third wave of infections. Many Asian countries where the ICF alumni live continue to struggle with the impact of the pandemic. We are in difficult times. Our plans are so volatile, as no one can clearly predict when the pandemic will end.

Winding up the 2018-2020 Program Phase

The two-and-a-half program phase from 2018-2020 was ending on June 30, 2020. However, because of the pandemic, ICF was granted an extension-at-no-cost until September 2020.

In this light, ICF reconfigures its plans within the extension period. The two thematic workshops set to be held in Bangladesh in March, and in Cambodia in April were all postponed. In place of the face-to-face thematic workshops, ICF will launch digital activities—meetings and workshops—within the remaining months of the year 2020.

Yet, ICF deems that face-to-face gathering for the Asian Youth Interfaith Peace Summit is irreplaceable. Thus, ICF decided to cancel it. It was originally set to be held in Penang, Malaysia in May. But the Program Committee, during its meeting in January 2020 in Kuala Lumpur, decided to hold it in Manila in September 2020. Since the situation in Manila and in other Asian countries are clearly not going well, ICF finally cancelled the Peace Summit.

The 2020-2023 Program Phase

The next phase, as approved by the partner donor, Bread for the World, will start in October 2020.

Early on, ICF had set the schedule of the two-week Peace Institute on Nonviolent Communication. This was to be held in the Philippines in August 2020 as a Training of Trainers. ICF has to postpone also this activity to 2021.

The two-months School of Peace 2020 is another casualty of the pandemic. Arrangements had begun with a theological seminary in Kathmandu, and with some ICF alumni. Again, because of uncertainty when the pandemic ends, ICF has also postponed the SoP to 2021.

Keeping the Faith

The staff of ICF, along with APAY personnel, lift up all the alumni and the world in our prayers in these times of difficulty. Keep the faith. This too shall pass. With the lessons learned from this epoch, we move on to the "new normal" of doing things.

ICF urges the ICF alumni, friends and peace networks to check the ICF Facebook and website for updates. Moreover, this e-newsletter edition focuses on reflections and narrative of experiences during the pandemic.



Reflection: Lockdown Blues

Hamsiya Olimpain, SoP 2019 Philippines

When was the last time that we care about our farmers? Or do we even recognize their existence? We always forgot about them. But in one way or another, we remember them now because of the coronavirus. Because of them we still have food on our table now. They are our “back liners.”

Our farmers and fisherfolks are among the poorest sectors in the Philippines. It is sickening to think that people who are the source of what we eat daily are the ones who do not eat well. During this crisis, health is our main concern. But sometimes, I came to think and asked if this (the coronavirus) is all to be feared? Maybe yes, but the poor Filipinos that include the farmers are not just afraid of the coronavirus itself. They are also afraid of the great impact of the pandemic. It is the hunger that they fear. They feared their children and their families will go hungry. Despite the threat of coronavirus, our farmers did not skip a day to till the land and to continue to provide food for us. There were restrictions because of the lockdown and social distancing. But if they stop working, how can we survive?

The news every day that there are more



Farmer-partners of Peace-CREED preparing the seedbed for coffee beans.
Photo credit: Hamsiya Olimpain

people infected by the coronavirus made me sick both mentally and physically. I am frustrated with our government’s approach towards flattening the curve. Some of our law enforcers are violating the people’s rights instead of helping them out from the difficult situation.

The long months of lockdown and enhanced community quarantine made me reflect on how COVID-19 affected my personal life and learned some lessons. First, in the next election, I must vote wisely. Second, I will strengthen my faith in God. Third, I will go back to what I started—to pursue peace and good governance. During the time of lockdown and enhanced community quarantine, I felt hopeless about what would happen on the next day and to the next generation if we continue to have this kind of leadership. As a Peacebuilder, I used to bring my organization to the community to help voice out what the people need in their communities. But at this time, we faced more challenges. We used to work on the ground/field to assess and be with our partners. During the lockdown, it was very difficult for us to reach out to our partner communities. Not everyone has access to a high-speed internet



Farmer-partners of Peace-CREED preparing materials for mulching..
Photo credit: Hamsiya Olimpain

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Reflection: Lockdown Blues

Hamsiya Olimpain, SoP 2019

connection. We could not even get one bar for a signal. But we have to deal with this. This is the only thing that we can do at this time, to reach out to our people in the rural areas through social media, when we get the right connection.

With that, my organization, the Peace CREED- Philippines and I, in partnership with Kapit-Mindanao

and other youth organizations across the country launched a digital fundraising campaign that aims to enable the youth-led organizations to give aid to the Mindanao communities affected by this global health crisis. Although this is like a small act throwing a small stone into everyone will throw more into it. "Change starts with yourself." 🦋🦋



Hamsiya Olimpain, co-founder and Project Manager of Peace-CREED

A Simple Act of Kindness to the Vulnerable Families in Kathmandu

Kaushila Sunuwar, SoP 2019. Nepal

Lockdown is causing difficulties and lack of food especially to the poor and labor sector in Nepal. People could not get into any company to work. I always visited a promenade near my home in the morning and evening time. It was then that I saw these people suffering, with no food to eat. Having seen the situation, I planned to distribute food items.

I shared this plan with Mohammad Rahaman, also an ICF alumnus in Nepal, to raise funds to buy goods for the people. We did self-funding and asked other people to also donate some amount and food items. After that, we identified the neediest among the people.



Kaushila (left) and Mohammad (center) with a friend packed food items for distribution.

Photo credit: Kaushila Sunuwar

On May 27, 2020, we distributed food items to twenty-two families in Gaushala place, Province 3, Kathmandu. These people were very much thankful for the support we provided. We are still planning to distribute to other families and we are welcoming everyone to also donate food items and join our cause to help the needy people in Nepal. 🦋🦋🦋



Kaushila Sunuwar,
SoP 2019
Photo credit:
Kaushila Sunuwar



Mohammad Ayatulla
Rahaman, SoP 2017
Photo credit:
Kaushila Sunuwar

The Challenge of COVID-19 in Bangla communities

Rinku Barnabas Mankhin, SoP 2019

The coronavirus that caused the COVID-19 pandemic has shaken Bangladesh just as it badly affects other countries. Before the virus spread in the countryside of Bangladesh, the government implemented some preventive measures such as borders shut down, cancellation of flights, travel restrictions to other districts and provinces, closure of schools, colleges, universities, supermarkets and offices, and lockdown of cities. Due to these circumstances, people are distressed and suffered a lot since they cannot go out to work and earn a living to support the needs of the family.

With the given situation, I thought of how I can support my community people in this pandemic as I do not have enough skills and resources. I called some of my younger sisters, brothers, and friends and we sat together to talk about how we can contribute to our communities. On March 21, 2020, we started working on distributing leaflets to provide awareness on COVID-19 among the people at the local market of Utrail, Birisiri. The leaflet mainly contains some important information on the prevention of the coronavirus infection that causes COVID-19. Among them are proper hand washing, the importance of staying at home, maintaining social distance, and wearing face masks and gloves, avoiding meetings, and social gathering among others. We also shared information on the nature of coronavirus such as the symptoms of the infection, and what should be done when the symptoms appear. What we did was simply giving basic education to the people about the coronavirus and the illness it brings. We were aware that what we were doing was not enough to protect our community people. To continue our initiatives, I called the young people for an important meeting again and we formed a strong team we called the "Challenge Covid-19



The Challenge COVID-19 Team with Rinku (3rd from the right)
Photo credit: Rinku Mankhin

Team.” During the discussions, we planned some initiatives such as disinfecting the communities of Birisiri, the vehicles on the road, the local market, and the persons who come in and out from village to market. We distributed masks and soaps. We also collected donations to buy relief goods and distributed them among the poorest and the needy.

After planning, we started to act on those initiatives. But it was not easy for us. We did not have any financial support. We faced obstacles and a risk of being infected by the COVID-19. But we were and still are strongly committed to serving our community people in this critical condition so we did not stop working. Then we divided our work into three different campaigns to implement those plans.

The First and Second Campaign

In our first and second campaigns, we focused on the disinfection of the communities from one village to another in Birisiri. The goal is to spread awareness of the importance of disinfection to drivers and passengers. We also distributed one hundred masks to poor people as our way of spreading the message about the importance of wearing face masks to protect themselves and to protect others from

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The Challenge of COVID-19 in Bangla communities

Rinku Barnabas Mankhin, SoP 2019

coronavirus. In doing these, we also needed medicines, hand sanitizers, gloves, and surgical masks to protect ourselves from getting infected. Given that we did not have any financial support, we asked for donations from the people who were willing and interested to support and join our cause.

At first, people did not believe and accept our ideas easily. We faced a lot of questions from them. Why are we doing this kind of activity? Who sends us to this work? People asked many more questions. But we did not mind being asked and these questions did not stop us from working because we are strongly committed to continuing our service to other people who needed our help. Then as days went by, we receive a great response from some people who were strongly encouraged and inspired by our activities. We were happy with the support we got from them. It inspired us to continue. Despite the negative reactions we get from some people, more people gradually became conscious about the danger of the coronavirus and the illness COVID-19. Eventually, they follow government protocols and rules to protect themselves.

The Third Campaign

The responses to our call for donations provided us with a good amount of funds. We were able to buy some of the essential needs to protect ourselves from getting infected. We saved some amount of money out of the donations, and we decided to use it to buy basic items for distribution to some needy people.



Distribution of the Relief goods to the most needy in the community. The distribution was done in the school premises.

Photo Credit: Rinku Mankhin



Crossing the Simsak River to distribute the relief goods.
Photo credit: Rinku Mankhin

Again, it was not easy for us as we faced many obstacles set by some local people. As volunteers, we worked hard. We had a very little amount of funds, but many people were requesting relief goods. At first, we distributed relief goods among thirty needy families. We were surprised that after these relief activities, we started to get a great response from our community people. They started to support us by donating money, rice, white flour, oil, and other things. Because of that, we were able to help the community of West and East Utrail, Telunjia, Sagordigi, Bhonbanipur, West and East Baroipara, Ghoraiyat, Goalpara, Gohalideo, Bonogram and Solpokuronia in Birisiri. After a few days, we thought we need to move from Birisiri to other places. Then we went and distributed relief in the communities of Ranikhong, Boheratoli, Boraikandi, Bijoypur, Komlabari, Dahapara, and Badambari, which are situated close to the Indian Border in Durgapur Upozila. In going to these places, we needed to cross the Simsang River. Every volunteer worked whenever we crossed the Simsang River carrying the bags of relief. It was really hard because aside from having risks of being infected by the coronavirus, there was also the risk in crossing the river. But these did not stop us from working hard to do our commitment to serving our communities. We were

The Challenge of COVID-19 in Bangla communities

Rinku Barnabas Mankhin, SoP 2019

able to distribute relief items to two hundred sixty poor and needy families. At present we are trying to ask for another donation to support more communities and families in Bangladesh. We are doing our best to help and looking for some donations to implement our next plan until the fight for COVID-19 ends.

My experiences during this COVID-19 pandemic made me realize the struggles of many people to find support and provide for the daily meals and the needs of their families. I think that the government should make more efforts in helping its people to survive during these times. The fight for COVID-19 may take a lot of works and efforts but we, the

"Challenge COVID-19 Team" will continue to help especially the needy and poor families of our country. 🙏🙏



Rinku Mankhin, SoP 2019



Where are we going?

Eremie "Mii Mii" Ratunil, Peace Institute I
Philippines

It has been more than six months already since the coronavirus that caused the COVID-19 pandemic Corona-Virus hit the Philippines and the whole world. People were hiding in their homes, praying and hoping that soon the virus would be wiped out. Quarantines and lockdowns were implemented. But still, we see the fact differently as everyday record shows the rapid increase of infected patients. It is indeed a struggle with no end in sight yet—not yet!

Every morning is the same usual story for everyone during lockdown or quarantine. People wake up, eat, do some chores, read or watch terrifying news, and then later prepare to sleep again. Every morning is laden with the burden to

wake up to reality's bite. The soaring and sweltering effect of the coronavirus shows no sign of ending its impact. The only way to stop it from killing more people all over the world is to find an antidote for it. Everyone could turn into a potential victims victim and yet, the antidote is vague still nowhere to be found. and out of sight. The frail truth lies wide open for everyone. Even a five-year-old kid would know that unless there is a cure, the future is still gloomy.

Where are we going exactly? Are we moving towards the goal of ending the virus or are we just waiting to be the next victim?

Recently, a CovidCOVID-19-patient from Cagayan de Oro City brought fear and anxiety to everyone especially

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Where are we going?

Eremie "Mii Mii" Ratunil, Peace Institute I

the person had from the given fact that it has no travel history or had close contact with another COVID-19-patient. The news troubled the locality people of the city. It pointed to the reality that it could mean a gigantic and scary fact that the transmission was local, and made locally, hence jeopardizing everyone's safety. Yet, it is a crestfallen fact to know that amidst the frightful and unknown possibilities, the local and government was and is going rather to the opposite direction that put everyone at risk. It is as though we are sleeping in complacency. What if there was more than just one COVID-19-patient in the city?

Being complacent is an irresponsible act. It is an act of cowardice. It is why the Philippines got a record of more than fifty-one thousand infected people as of July 9, 2020. It is the reason why the world is going upside-down. Being complacent is an act of conspiracy against the people. Knowing the fact straight-forward, why can't we be more careful and avoid thinking that everything was just a mere piece of cake? Our enemy is an invisible hideous monster and we cannot afford to risk more lives before we finally come to a realization.

Every day we are facing an awful number of deaths from people who could have been saved if only the government took practical parameters first-hand right at the very beginning. The people who have died surely did not deserve to die. Their deaths could have been prevented, only if we and our government were are not too complacent about the situation.

The economy is facing a terrible challenge. The world is becoming furious but we could not afford to lose more lives. Where are we going then? The sluggish development, some people say, is the outcome of our indolence, but there is a bigger reason for the slow growth. It is structural. The reason for the ineffective control of the pandemic is not just structural, it is also highly politicized. Prevention should have been done on day one. Addressing the pandemic in the middle of the speedy spread will just be too late. The coronavirus would have taken hold already of people's lives, including the front-liners, and they die an unnecessary death. 🙏🙏🙏

Where are we now?

Nasser Midsapak Matula, Peace Institute 2
Philippines



Nasser Matula is the secretary-general of a youth organization called MyPeace: Boses ng Kabataan (The Voice of the Youth). This organization is based in North Cotabato, Philippines.

Why do I ask this question? I want to ask where we are in this crisis and trying times? How do you make sense of what is going on around you? And what did you do? Before the COVID-19 came and the community quarantine

implementation, what were you doing? Was there a change in your life amid the enhanced community quarantine? I imagine that you told yourself that you need to do something to help out no matter how small is the effort. It was mid-March 2020 when the government imposed the community quarantine to fight the novel coronavirus that causes the disease named COVID-19. We faced different issues and hindrances, and different hashtags emerged.

#StayAtHome
#SocialDistancing

Where are we now?

Nasser Midsapak Matula, Peace Institute 2

#WearingMaskAnyTimeEveryWhere
 #WashingHandProperly
 #WorkFromHome
 #FakeNews
 #PanicBuying;
 #LackOfSanitizerAndAlcoholSupply,
 #HomeQuarantine; and
 #CommunityLockdown.

As a youth, we need to be responsible individuals in making our actions match our words. Do not let fear immobilize you and prevent you to do something. People have different perspectives and mindsets. We cannot easily please everyone. We cannot make them like what we are doing. Focus, improve, and collaborate with others until you make impacts on the initiatives and efforts that you want to do.

In these trying times, I realized that innovation does not necessarily mean programming works. We must utilize our social media accounts to extend help to the people in our community either by creating a solution by ourselves or by crowdsourcing for those who can. Let us all adopt technology and use it wisely because this is the power of youth nowadays. With the access that we have, we must be more creative and imaginative. Do not be afraid to share our opinions with everyone because the youth have the right to voice out our opinion. Let us pursue our idea and curiosity as these lead us to have potential in different things. Sharing and providing relevant, timely, correct, and verified information can move and change the entire mindset of people and a wider perspective of society. I will make sure that the knowledge I have acquired will not just stay in my mind but is put into practice. With the technology that we have nowadays, we need to know how to use it effectively. Let us not abuse it by misusing the information that is

accessible to us. We should still check the facts well to ensure that what we share is credible enough.



MyPeace Team with Nasser (center) during a Youth Consultation in Pikit, Cotabato. Their T-shirts say, "Stop the Spread." "Not all heroes wear capes." "Frontliners COVID-19 Response Team." "This fight is our fight."

Photo Credit: Nasser Matula

Today is a great opportunity for us to reflect. Let us understand our situation and contribute to the solutions. Listen to the deafening silence. Be the voice of the voiceless. Start with a small thing. Discover your talent and use it in a good way. Find someone to work with, connect, and collaborate. As the most accessible tool to connect with others, let us give at least an hour to utilize it in spreading positive thoughts, reliable information, and supporting a group of people working with the community. Practice volunteerism and raise funds. Let us demand and work for positive change and start it within the self. Contemplate on today's situation to prepare for the future. Then, influence and work with others, irrespective of their beliefs, race, and color. Give value to unity amidst diversity.

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Where are we now?

Nasser Midsapak Matula, Peace Institute 2

We must change our lifestyle for the good of our environment, and protect our mother earth. This pandemic has something to do with human activities. Let us start to promote zero-waste lifestyles. Start small, like using a metal straw or bamboo straw, organic and eco-friendly products, and patronizing the local enterprises. We must be responsible and pro-active advocates. As Asians, we should uphold and protect the environment. If we care for Mother Nature, in turn, Mother Nature will take care of us. Being mindful of our people's practices is important in being an Active Citizen too. We can only affect positive change around us if we change ourselves. Today's issues and concerns reminded me that we should always walk the talk. I ask myself how to make use of my knowledge on many things, and how will I integrate these in helping the communities practice environmental conservation and innovation. I realized the importance of collaboration, strategic planning, and creativity in making a solution. We should innovate and utilize our resources to help our fellow human beings. If you want to see a change within society, you have to be an active citizen.

As a youth, I can try different ways to help our country. I have to identify what to do and how to share it with others. This pandemic crisis has given me a chance to think about my passion and



MyPeace Team with Nasser Matula (left)

Photo credit: Nasser Matula

skills. I will develop it as an instrument or a way to help out others. I learned that failure is normal. It is okay to struggle and be discouraged sometimes, as long as we are willing to get up and face tomorrow with heads held up high. Our voices may not be heard amidst the noise everywhere, but if we truly believe that our message has power then we shouldn't fret. Our voices will be heard because there would always be people who will support our advocacy.

Do not be scared of using social media and other platforms in speaking up and raising people's awareness. The pandemic should not keep us from working for environmental protection. We can always start in our homes now, not tomorrow. This is the starting point for our larger goals of action for a larger scale in the future.

Be an inspiration. Learn how to lead. Be an environmental advocate. Learn from past experiences. These summarize all that I have realized in today's crisis. As a youth, we need to showcase all our ideas to inspire and influence others. We use both our voices and our traditional wisdom and practices to share our views, networking, support the different advocacies of civil society and use innovative technology to implement programs in this state of the "new normal."

So, this is where we are now. We may have different standards in life but we can find our commonalities. The youth is the hope and future of our nation. We should use this honor given to us. 🙏🙏🙏



Local Youth session on Democracy and Human Rights in times of Pandemic

Photo credit: Nasser Matula

The Repercussions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic

Malik Lawrence Daniels, SoP 2018, Sri Lanka

In most crises, the felt effects are uneven. The repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic are twofold: as a direct result of the crisis, and on how the state responds to it. While the lockdown was a measure implemented to mitigate the threat of COVID-19, it has produced unintended consequences and circumstances that are yet to be addressed. In Sri Lanka, the lockdown was implemented since March 2020 as an effort to control the spread of the viral disease. It has challenged the livelihoods and lives of several groups. "Staying at home" and the extended curfew periods meant unbearable twinge of hunger and abuse behind closed doors. The casualty is not just the economy. The lockdown also impacted the physical, social, and emotional dimensions of human life. This compilation of vignettes gives us "snapshots" of the lives of the vulnerable groups in Sri Lanka that I have encountered.

Street Cleaners and Garbage Collectors

Parakrama Wethasinghe, age 55, drives a garbage truck for the Kandy Municipal Council. "We are essential workers, so we have to work during curfew too," he said, washing his hands with a bar of soap which he now carries around, after the COVID-19 outbreak. Equipped with the mandatory face mask and gloves, Wethasinghe and his fellow workers are on duty, doing their respective garbage collection routes. "Our salaries are paid. The cleaners are also showing up for work," he said. "When the lockdown was announced, I could have gone home to Matale, a city in Sri Lanka where my family lives," Wethasinghe said. "But I chose not to. It's better to stay in Kandy, a city in the middle of Sri Lanka. We get food and a bed to sleep in, and I can send money to my family. It's not so bad." He told me earlier in May.

Domestic Workers

Most middle class and lower-middle-class families employ domestic workers to help them with their workload. Now, with everyone at home and with finances uncertain, the need for a domestic worker is getting less. After the curfew was imposed, the domestic workers could not travel to work, and those who reside at their employers' houses were asked to return to their hometowns.

"No money means no food," explained part-time domestic worker and President of the Domestic Workers' Union (DWU), Sarasgopal Satyavani. "Even if the food lorries bring food to our area, everyone struggles to purchase something," she added. Domestic work in Sri Lanka is severely unrecognized and excluded from several labor laws. Although the union has been lobbying for laws that benefit the workers, in light of this crisis, the process will be delayed further. "The workers face not only short-term but also long-term consequences," she added. "In a situation where our employers themselves are struggling to keep their jobs, I do not know what kind of work will be there for domestic

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Photo credit: Malik Lawrence Daniels

The Repercussions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic

Malik Lawrence Daniels, SoP 2018, Sri Lanka

workers in the future,” Satyavani said during the media conference held on head office DWU Colombo.

Victims of Child Abuse

The National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) has observed a rise in reports of child cruelty following the COVID-19 lockdown. “During the time that curfew has been in place, the NCPA’s 1929 hotline has recorded 352 complaints,” Professor Muditha Vidanapathirana, chairperson of the NCPA said at the NCPA press conference on May 5, 2020. 152 of these complaints are of cruelty, physical and psychological trauma that children experience in their own homes. Before the lockdown, complaints of abuse were not restricted to domestic environments.

“Before the curfew, the NCPA received roughly 40 complaints a day, out of which four of them were cases of cruelty against children. During the curfew months (17 March - 17 April) there was a significant increase in cases of cruelty. Cruelty cases went up to six cases, out of the 10 complaints we received every day,” she noted. During this period, the child cruelty cases reported to the NCPA have increased from 10 to 60 percent. Many more cases likely go unheard.

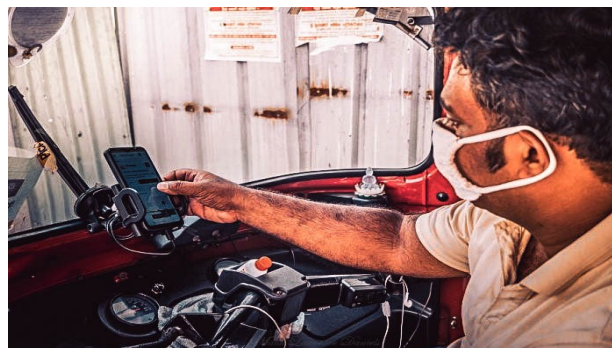
Tuk-Tuk (auto-rickshaw) Drivers

Krishnamoorthy, age 47, is known to many as ‘Krishna’ in my village. Usually, he wakes up early in the morning to take his children to school, before starting his work, driving his Tuk-Tuk.

“Sometimes I get hired soon after taking my children to school, but at other times I have to wait for a while. Depending on the day, I can earn between LKR. 2,000-2,500 on average,” he said. “Sometimes I earn enough, sometimes less.”

(Ed: USD 1 = 185.83 LKR or Sri Lankan Rupee)

These days, Krishna has no income due to the lockdown. He lives with his wife, four children, and his mother. As the sole breadwinner, he has to depend on donations and help from neighbors, friends, and relatives.



Krishnamoorthy

Photo credit: Malik Lawrence Daniels

Day Laborers

Shantha Dissananyaka, age 62, is a laborer attached to the Gampola Municipal Council. He was paid his last salary in March by his employer, but other benefits and overtime payments had been cut off. “The first week of the curfew was really difficult. We were supposed to receive aid from the naghara sabha (municipal council) but we didn’t,” he said. He also used to clean houses regularly to earn some extra money. Shantha and his wife live in Sinhapitiya, Gampola, a city in Sri Lanka. Their son, Chandana, told me, that his parents couldn’t buy anything even when the food Lorries started coming in. “Whenever the lorries came it would only go to some houses. By the time it reached us, everything was over,” he added. However, things changed over the next few weeks, and goods were made available to everyone. “Right now it’s manageable,” Chandana added. “But what happens when we run out of money? How are we going to buy anything from the Lorries? There are so many families in Sinhapitiya, who are already facing this situation. If the lockdown continues, what is going to happen when my family has no money to buy anything?”

Small-Time Pensioners

Sunitha Jayawardana, 83, receives two pensions, both of which belonged to her late husband. One is for his service as an officer in the Sri Lankan Army. The second is for his work at the United Nations office in Sri Lanka. “On a normal day, amma would receive her first payment to the post office and the other one would be deposited to her bank straight away,” Jayawardana’s

The Repercussions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic

Malik Lawrence Daniels, SoP 2018, Sri Lanka

daughter, Chandrika, told me. “This time, it was different.” Due to the lockdown, the Sri Lankan government implemented a strategy to hand-deliver the payments to retirees and their families via postal officers on the 2nd and 3rd day of the month. “Amma received that payment, from which we purchased her medicine. But it was not enough and she has a doctor’s appointment coming up soon. We were hoping to receive the other pension allowance as well, but we don’t think it will arrive anytime soon,” she added.

Factory Workers

Kandy Industrial Park, also known as KIP established by the Board of Investment, is rooted in export promotion and economic growth. KIP is a combination of factories and dwellings. Export processing zones are second-home to a workforce that forms the backbone of more than 42 percent of the country’s export economy. The first week of the curfew was extremely difficult for most workers at the Kandy Industrial Park. Indika Fernando, 52, lives with his wife and children in a boarding house. On 24 March, when a brief interlude for the lockdown was announced, he chose to queue at the grocery store with the little cash left in his hand. He couldn’t bear the thought of not taking any food back home before the curfew was re-imposed. “I would get calls from several other workers crying at night,” Indika told me. “One used to break down over the phone, feeling like a prisoner in his cramped rented room. Another missed her family, and counted her rations carefully – each grain of rice, dhal, the soya, and the cowpea,” he added.

Boarding houses within these zones can vary from rentable rooms to hostels for around 50-60 people. These buildings are home to people who shared space, a common clothesline that snakes its way, marking the outer edges of makeshift homes.

Another story....

“The first few days of the curfew were really difficult,” Nishanthi Jayasundara, 27, told me. Jayasundara is a factory worker at the Kandy Industrial Park. “I kept wondering if the food we have in our room was enough, but I was grateful that we had water to drink,” she said.

When the lockdown was first imposed, many of those who got stranded away from their hometowns were the workers and employees of the garment factories who were living in boarding houses within the KIP.

A week later, the companies provided transport for the workers who wished to travel back home. Some chose to stay behind and since then, have not returned to work amidst the lockdown.

Currently, a few factories have reopened, after adopting new safety measures against the COVID-19 crisis. Jayasundara is waiting to hear from her company so she can go back to work. “I was paid for March and April, but was told that for May depends on my willingness to come to work,” she added. However, not all workers have continued to receive a salary. They wonder about the months to come. They are part of the country’s apparel sector, estimated to be one of the hardest hit in the current economy.

Victims of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is not a new issue. But during the lockdown, there were financial and social pressures. During this time, the children are at home.

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The Repercussions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic

Malik Lawrence Daniels, SoP 2018, Sri Lanka

There is no travel and law enforcement is directed at tackling the COVID-19 crisis. This condition is worse for those who are locked in with an abuser.



An abode of an ordinary Sri Lankan family
Photo credits: Malik Lawrence Daniels

Textile Shop-owner

Chaminda Kumara, age 50, is from Kandy but owns and manages his textile shop located on the Colombo-Kandy Road. It is his main source of income to support his family who lives back in Kandy. He used to visit them occasionally whenever he could catch a break. But ever since the COVID-19 restrictions began, he has not been able to travel home and has been confined to his shop. It was during this time that he decided to start stitching masks and gloves using the material he had stored at the shop. His son too has been assisting him, and with the shop closed for sale, he thought this could generate an income for both of them to survive on.

Chaminda also felt that by selling these items at a reasonable price where there is a demand for it, he would be providing a service to the community. With permission obtained from the Police, he managed to set up his Tuk-Tuk (trishaw or auto-rickshaw) to sell his products to the public. People traveling along the Colombo- Kandy road would stop by to buy these masks and gloves from him. According to Chaminda even the little money he makes out of this, he is unable to send to his family due to his banking limitations. He has registered with the Police with the hopes that they will soon allow him to travel to see his family.

Water problems in the villages

For some citizens in Bogolla, Gampola, villages in Sri Lanka, water comes in short supply for half a year. "During the sunny season we don't have water supply," resident Nilanthi, 29, told me. Even though Nilanthi is currently in Colombo, she communicates regularly with her family who has been struggling to receive water during the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the drought season, some houses in the neighborhood open their private wells for others to use. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic, most neighbors have stopped allowing others to come into their homes. "They tell us that we might bring in the virus," she said.

Usually, the community works together to set up a water tank at a specific location for everyone to use. "When this happens, we can get around 10 liters of water to our houses by paying a Tuk-Tuk to bring the water for around LKR 200-250. Alternatively, we can go walking, though this takes around two hours or more," she added. "After the curfew was imposed, some members of the community began working together to distribute 4 liters to each house. But we are expected to make this last for four days."

The majority of Nilanthi's neighbors are daily wage earners. "Initially they did not receive essential food items and most ate half an unripe jackfruit for each meal to survive," she said. "Now things have improved with some receiving rations, though not all receive relief food supply. The main issue is securing a steady flow of water, which remains unresolved."



Photo credit: Malik Lawrence Daniels

The Repercussions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic

Seasonal businesses

Sunil Jayasundara, 70, is a retired government worker. He and several others in Central Market Kandy, get together every year to make Vesak lanterns for sale. Last year, the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks disrupted their lives and livelihoods. This year, the COVID-19 pandemic has made things even more difficult.

"I sell lantern frames and Vesak lanterns as well," he told me. "The curfew has not stopped people from celebrating the festival. Yes, it might not be like what it used to be but they will at least put up a lantern in their homes."

Jayasundara has seen steady sales since he began selling lanterns on Saturday, the 2nd of May, but it has not been on par with previous years. "If the Police come and ask me to go away, I will go home with my lanterns," he said. "But I will return in an hour or so to sell them because this is how I earn my living these days." Like Jayasundara, many who live in under-served communities have survived the lockdown thus far by taking on odd jobs, or through relief, or rations that are donated to them. Making and selling Vesak lanterns on that first week of May was a

source of income if they found a way to sell them. (Ed. Vesak is a Buddhist celebration of the birth, life, and



A man selling vegetables and fruits by the street.

Photo credit: Malik Lawrence Daniels

I hope these vignettes would help the readers get some insight into the repercussions in the lives of ordinary Sri Lankan people during these days when the COVID-19 pandemic continues threaten the nations. ❧ ❧ ❧

Dear ICF family and friends,
Please submit your articles—news, reflections, and art works if you have any, Send your photo, and a 2-sentence blurb along with photos related to your articles.
Thanks and looking forward to receiving your articles.

Keep well and stay safe!
ICF Staff

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Selling assorted wares and items.
Photo credit: Malik Lawrence Daniels



Malik Lawrence Daniels works at the Department of Prisons in Kandy, Sri Lanka. He also volunteers at Kandy YMCA. His hobby is photography.



Coping with stress and anxiety in times of the pandemic

Baidido Manalasal Saganding, SoP 2018

ICF Program Officer

Reading and watching the news now and then can be stressful. Unknowingly, these greatly affect our well-being, especially at this time of the pandemic. A few months ago, I became so stressed and I even reached the point of being paranoid. The cases of COVID-19 infection around the world were getting higher and higher every day. The government implemented social distancing, even with the imposed lockdown. The government also encouraged people to work at home as much as possible.

I became so paranoid that every morning, upon waking up I checked my body temperature and myself became part of my routine. I became very anxious that I might be the next addition to the statistics. Every time I feel having dry cough and body pain, I would start tracking down the places where I went so that would be easy for the health workers to do the contact tracing, just in case.

I created scenarios in my mind that added to my headache. What if I cannot make it and I will be cremated? Many what-ifs came to my mind at that time. Living miles away from home and my family is another issue. Adding up to my anxieties was the news I read and watch every day: health workers got infected and some did not survive; the government is too incompetent in responding to the COVID-19 and so on.

I was creating things and scenarios in my mind that unknowingly and unconsciously affected my well-being greatly. I experienced body pain and headache not because I got the COVID-19 symptoms but because I lacked sleep due to stress and anxiety.

I am used to doing some basic things for me to maintain my well-being and to protect my mental health, but it is another issue when there are things that I cannot control. To protect myself from being

drowned with bad feelings, at that time, I reminded myself of the following:

1. Experts said that anxiety is completely normal especially in times of crisis and that we need to recognize this feeling. This is true. I knew that there is nothing wrong with my feelings. I became aware that this was a normal reaction to a very abnormal situation.
2. I get in touch with my feelings. I allowed the feelings to flow and accepted those feelings until I start to feel better.
3. I snoozed and stopped following the news sites and even my friends on Facebook. Heavy consumption of bad news can increase stress and anxiety. I limited my exposure to news and social media to only specific hours or times of the day. I did not engage in arguments over matters on social media as these will make me feel worse.
4. I accepted the fact there are things that I cannot control and told myself that I can control how I respond to those things.
5. Health experts said that people should need to maintain good health and increase the resistance to illness by eating nutritious foods such as vegetables and others. Given that I have a weak immune system and I hardly eat vegetables, I forced myself to eat vegetables. It was a challenge and later on, I began to learn to love it slowly.
6. I stay connected with my family and friends, thanks to social media. I also practice social and physical distancing.
7. Last but not the least, keeping the faith high! Prayer is the best way to ease anxiety and for our protection.

These things may not apply to other people, but it worked for me. At the end of the day, it is only the person who can help one's self. There is nothing wrong with seeking support from friends and family if needed. Let us stay healthy physically, emotionally, and mentally while facing the new normal. 🌸🌸🌸

INTERFAITH COOPERATION FORUM

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The Interfaith Cooperation Forum is a program of Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCAs. It values the significance of interreligious understanding and unity. Thus, it offers opportunities for study and appreciation of the different perspective of religions on peace, and discern the role of religion in peacebuilding. Yet, considering that unpeace is brought about by many factors, including the onslaught of neoliberal economic globalization, more people experience poverty, internally displaced people are increasing as communities are destroyed, native wisdom and values are overrun by Western and consumerist outlooks, patriarchy and racism persists, and climate change is now felt as the destruction of the Planet Earth seems unabated.

Peace is celebrated as a gift from the Divine, yet, we, the earthlings have the responsibility to make peace a reality. Although its contribution may just be like a drop of water into the lake, ICF seeks to equip young people of different religious traditions, especially from the marginalized communities of Asia and Pacific, to make waves of peacebuilding actions.



From the Editor's Desk:

Keeping the Faith . . . This too, shall pass!

PPeace greetings from Hong Kong!

In the past months, I was invited to speak, both recorded and live. I struggled with what to say to people amid the worldwide crises. The people were affected by the crisis on public health, economic, among others.

The faith in a God who is with us in our struggle to survive gave me a kind of stability. I worried I cannot go home and enjoy my family and my garden but it did not shake my faith. In the face of death, I found that grieving well was helpful. Keeping myself busy gave me a sense of "normal" life, even as the face masks, hand sanitizers, frequent washing of hands, and social distancing have also become a fixture in our lives. The virtual meetings with friends and group chats with family have helped some sense of normality. These veered my attention away from the impulse to brood over my issues.

Yet, other than COVID-19, I find the justice and peace situation in the Asian region and beyond disquieting. In the Philippines, the newly signed Anti-Terrorism Law (ATL) brings back the memories of the dark days of Ferdinand Marcos' martial law. The indictment of Rappler's editor-in-chief, Maria Ressa,

the closure of a big broadcasting company, the red-tagging of Sr. Mary John Mananzan, the arrest of a pastor on trumped-up charges signal the attack on people's basic rights. Even before the ATL, thousands had been killed at the altar of the "war on drugs." Dissenting voices were silenced, lives snuffed out, including environmentalists and 49 lawyers within the present dispensation. Indigenous peoples continue to be displaced, and the victims of the Marawi onslaught remains homeless. The litany can go on and on.

Hong Kong's precarious situation today makes the Hongkongers wary of the effects of the New Security Law on their freedoms and democratic aspirations. The leaders though, tried to assuage these anxieties, pointing out such fear as baseless.

In whatever situation, we are called to trust that our just Creator, the God of many names, bids us continue teaching and living a just and peaceable lifestyle especially in times of living dangerously. The prophets and apostle Paul urge us not to be afraid, keep the faith, and speak. God's love sustains. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Only God's love stays forever; this too shall pass, in God's time. ✨ ✨ ✨

Please send us news about your Forums, Alumni programs, ICF Partner events or activities related to peacebuilding to:

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