

HOPE FOR CHILDREN AND COMMUNITIES

Action against the COVID-19 pandemic

FY21: April 2020 - March 2021



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We express our deepest appreciation to the children, youth, families and communities who offered us opportunities to work together during the past fiscal year (April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021) and accompany them in building healthy environments, resilience and positive futures.

Thank you to our staff, partners, collaborators and donors who contributed to our work. Your support enabled us to safeguard those we serve from COVID-19 and provide access to the resources and services needed to counter its devastating impact, such as food insecurity, disruption of education and increased violence.

We would like to recognize our leadership teams for their relentless efforts and assistance in navigating adjustments to our program activities, so that we may better address the most urgent needs of children and communities struggling with COVID-19.

This report is the result of collaboration among many individuals. We acknowledge the contributions of all the country directors, our program and communications managers, MELKS officers from our six locations outside Canada and partner program staff. Sincere appreciation is extended to Khodeza Hossain, MELKS manager, for supporting the management of data at the global level, and the MELKS teams, for data management at the country level.

Finally, acknowledgement goes to Feleke Tadele, director of program effectiveness and resource management, for his leadership, coordination and writing of the global report and to Belinda Bennet, chief international programs officer, for her insights and contributions at the draft stage of the report. Thanks also to Sandra Upeslakis, director of strategic communications, and Crystal Lee, editorial manager, for report editing and Dave Stell, communications manager, for design support.

Children Believe, 2021

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BFASO	Burkina Faso
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
CDN	Canadian
ETH	Ethiopia
FY21	Fiscal Year 2021
GHA	Ghana
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
IND	India
MELKS	Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Knowledge Sharing
NIC	Nicaragua
PAR	Paraguay
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

FOREWORD

COVID-19 was a pervasive presence in people's lives around the world in 2020-2021. The breadth of its reach and the severity of the virus are two strong factors driving its impact, but so was the fact that our world did not anticipate its arrival or its many consequences.

Everyone experienced challenges related to the pandemic, be it illness, loss or restrictions, but our experiences have not been equal. The pandemic has amplified pre-existing inequalities, further marginalizing the most vulnerable. Children and women are two populations in this group, and they are focused on in Children Believe's work.

Our organization, like many others across the globe, was suddenly confronted with a new context for our existence and challenged with the increasing pace of humanitarian need. In the face of this, I'm proud to say that the urgency and extent of the demand was met with the fervent agility of our programming and staff, and the unwavering generosity of our donors.

We quickly and collaboratively shifted the focus of our programming to areas of greatest concern, including COVID-19 prevention, food security, violence prevention and continuity of education. To support these efforts, our resources were reallocated. This was achievable because of the support and flexibility of our donors, who demonstrated the same commitment to responding to areas of greatest need.

This special edition of our annual report will take you through our COVID-19 response in detail. It will describe the actions implemented across the six countries where we provided programs through the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Outcomes will also be shared to identify the impact of our initiatives.

I believe there is some cause for celebration, as many positive results from the dedication, effort and compassion of staff, partners, donors, communities and young people are on full display, but we cannot yet say the pandemic battle has been won. The spread of the virus is still a threat and the negative effects remain present.

Allow our mission statement to resonate: For more than 60 years, we have created a future of hope for children, families and communities by helping them develop skills and resources to overcome barriers. The momentum of change and the creation of hope are with us, so I urge you not to give way to fatigue. In this global fight, it is through a united effort that we'll succeed. We need only come together, look confidently into the future and take a step forward for progress to be achieved.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fred Witteveen", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Fred Witteveen
Chief Executive Officer, Children Believe

I—INTRODUCTION

Fiscal year 2021 (FY21), from April 2020 to March 2021, was a remarkable year for Children Believe Programs and Policy work as our program priorities and engagement with partners were largely dominated by COVID-19 response, recovery and resilience-building endeavors.

Since the outbreak of the virus, Children Believe and our local partners repurposed program priorities and adjusted key performance indicators (KPIs) to effectively respond to the threat of the pandemic across all of our six countries of operation. We took coordinated, swift and decisive program actions to protect and support the health and well-being of children, women and all other vulnerable people across our operational areas. By working together with over 27 local implementing partners and following the advice of public health officials in each of the six countries, Children Believe contributed to the steady progress in the fight against COVID-19.

Children Believe adopted a three-staged approach in tackling COVID-19 – response, recovery and resilience – which unfolded over each quarter of our fiscal year. The first quarter was the **response** stage where our focus was to reprioritize annual resource allocations, rearrange working modalities for staff and local partners, and orient program guidelines and tools.

At this early stage, it was also possible to work with relevant stakeholders to enforce public health measures and promote awareness creation as well as public education programs to stop COVID-19 from infecting children and families in vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities.

Continuing the response stage, quarter two followed with the **consolidation** of our COVID-19 prevention work and efforts to ensure children had access to food, which had become an issue because of the lockdown. Simultaneously, we consolidated our work with our partners to strengthen local child protection systems and prevent violence against children and women.



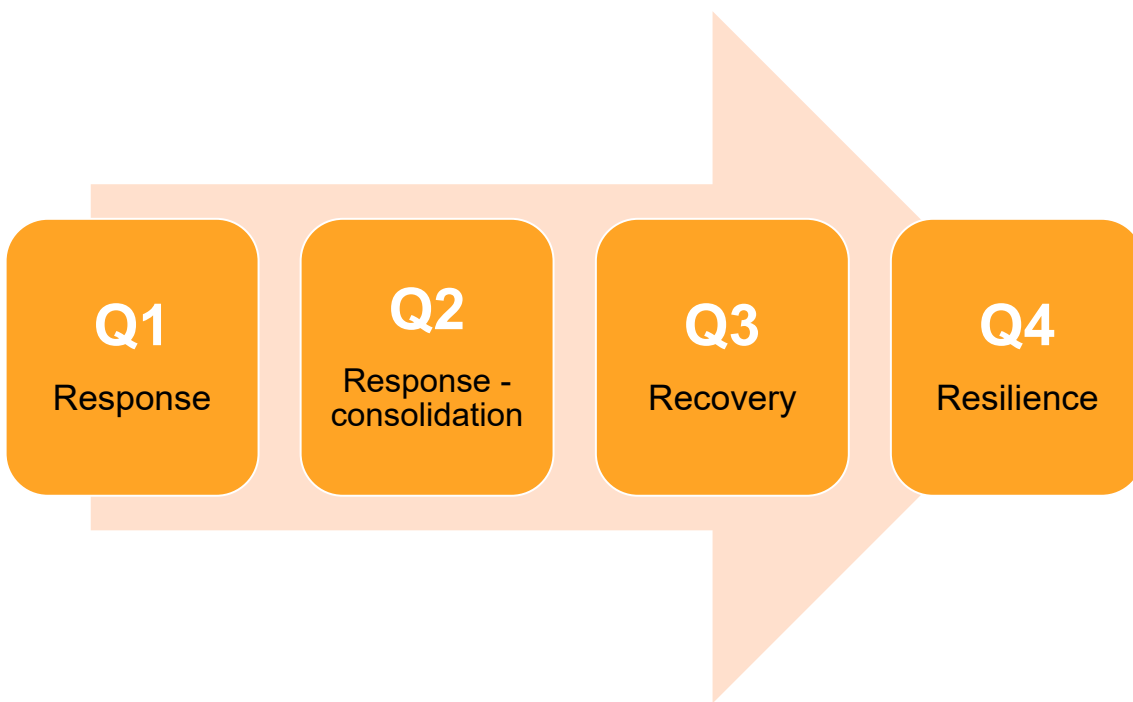
Children Believe provided assistance to ensure safe school environments.

In quarter three, Children Believe and our partners placed emphasis on COVID-19 **recovery** measures, notably preparing schools for reopening and ensuring the continuity of education. Several schools in remote areas received assistance in creating safer school environments and learning spaces through the improvement or upgrade of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities within school compounds.

In countries where a hybrid education system was adopted, Children Believe and our local partners supported the use of alternative education mechanisms such as educational radio and TV programs, organized messages and text sharing using mobile apps and virtual platforms.

The last quarter of FY21 focused primarily on building the resilience of children, women, vulnerable families and other community members, and strengthening local collaborations with relevant stakeholders.

DIAGRAM 1: COVID-19 RESPONSE, RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PROGRAM – A PHASED APPROACH



This report, therefore, covers a full year of COVID-19-focused work and presents the results from Children Believe’s and our partners’ efforts across our six countries of operation. It highlights the measures taken and the results achieved in preventing the transmission of COVID-19 and mitigating the consequences of the virus on the health, education and social and economic circumstances of vulnerable children, women and families across our target communities.

Specifically, the report provides a detailed analysis of the achievements from our COVID-19 program response grounded in the program’s four priorities:

1. **Stopping COVID-19 from infecting children and families**
2. **Ensuring children get the food they need**
3. **Keeping children safe from violence, physically and emotionally**
4. **Helping children continue learning**

The report also captures the lessons we learned over the course of implementing our COVID-19 program responses.



Vaccination clinics have been organized in India, such as this one held by Children Believe partner IRCDS.

II—CONTEXT: COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN

During FY21, we witnessed the long shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of children, families and communities across our six countries of operation. COVID-19 created an unprecedented global crisis: straining already overburdened social and health service delivery systems; triggering a humanitarian, socio-economic and human/child rights crisis; and exacerbating the inequalities and vulnerability of children and their families. It also highlighted the fragility of public health systems, which particularly impact the poor.

At the time of writing this report, there have been 167,492,769 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 3,482,907 deaths from 224 countries, areas or territories (World Health Organization, 26 May 2021). Almost 76-million cases, or 45.5 percent of all global cases, were from three countries: the United States (32.8 million), India (27.1 million) and Brazil (16.1 million).

India was the first of Children Believe's six implementing countries to have been widely affected by COVID-19. Unlike the initial prediction of huge numbers of potential cases in Africa, the COVID-19 outbreak on the African continent registered a total of 3.5-million confirmed cases, a recovery of 3.1 million and a death toll of 86,434 people. While South Africa continues to bear the highest burden of COVID-19 cases in Africa (43.1 percent), two of our countries of operation ranked second and sixth, Ethiopia (8.7 percent) and Ghana (2.8 percent), respectively.

The other three Children Believe operational countries have experienced relatively lower rates of COVID-19 cases in their respective regions. On the global list of COVID-19 cases by country, Paraguay comes in at 57th, Burkina Faso at 145th and Nicaragua at 166th.

The unfolding of the COVID-19 crisis during the past year made a severe impact on sustainable development endeavours in our countries. Regressive trends can be seen in the public health sector, and they're also threatening national learning outcomes, economic growth, social stability and national cohesion and integrity.

While the virus has affected everyone, the poorest and most vulnerable people have experienced the greatest consequences. COVID-19 has spread human suffering, destabilized local economies and upended the lives of the local communities we work with.

It quickly became apparent that the unequal country situations have been reinforced by the slowdown of global economic growth and setbacks in achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The World Bank (2021) disclosed that global income losses due to COVID-19 are expected to exceed \$220 billion in 'developing' countries, erasing trillions of dollars from the global GDP.

With an estimated 55 percent of the global population having inadequate social protection, these losses have reverberated across societies, impacting education, human rights and, in the poorest communities, basic food security and nutrition.

Millions of people have lost their jobs (SDG 8) and the ongoing economic crisis due to the pandemic has already pushed millions into severe poverty and exacerbated existing inequalities (SDG 1).

It is obvious that progress on health and well-being (SDG 3) has been thwarted. Already scarce resources and the capacities of health facilities have been overwhelmed by prevention and care measures needed for COVID-19-infected people. As a result of the pandemic, nutrition services for children, adolescents and women declined globally by nearly 40 percent in 2020 and led to the postponement of many integrated child health and nutrition

interventions. This was also observed in our countries of operation. However, as in many countries globally, health and nutrition services in most of our target communities were able to resume since the beginning of 2021. This was due to the efforts in increasing the capacities of local health providers to promote COVID-19 safety protocols and measures, including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), physical distancing and consistency in disinfection practices and cleaning of common surfaces.

As Children Believe’s program priorities centre around SDG 4, to achieve inclusive and equitable access to education, we are deeply concerned by global and national trends indicating that about 1.6-billion children and youth were out of school by April 2020 and over 200-million children are projected to still be out of school by 2030. Specifically, it was estimated that 7.6-million girls are at risk of not returning to school and 13-million additional child marriages are expected to take place between 2020 and 2030 (UNICEF, 2021).

During the COVID-19 outbreak, children in our operational communities have been deprived of formal education. For the most vulnerable and marginalized in urban slums, who relied on school for education as well as regular meals, they faced the added difficulty of meeting their daily nutrition needs. The pandemic has far-reaching consequences that have now jeopardized the hard-won gains made in

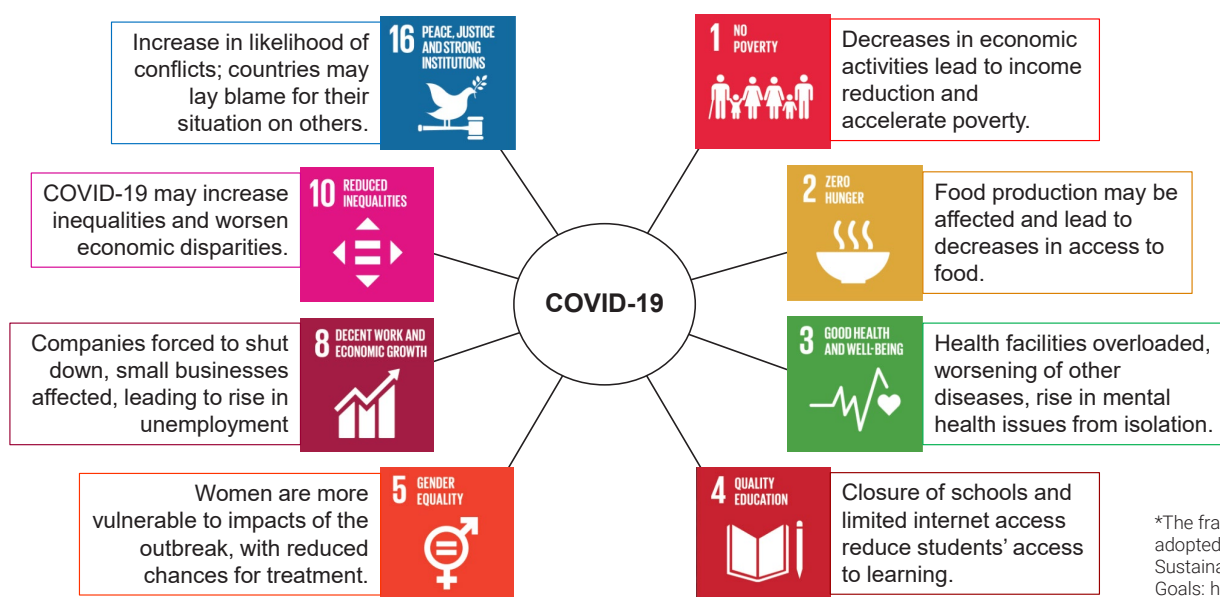
improving education, especially girls’ education, triggering the risk of reversing progress.

Additionally, the situation in the countries where we deliver programs, as in many across the world, has threatened the advances we’d made in reaching SDG 5’s gender equality goals, notably the targets to reduce the number of girls being forced into early marriage and to increase the number of women entering leadership roles.

Especially in countries such as Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Ghana, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the well-being of women, with increasing incidences of domestic violence.

This was similar to the global trend, which saw the pandemic increasing gender-based violence by 30 percent and placed a greater demand on women for unpaid care work (UN Women, 2021). Our field observations indicate that national violence prevention and response services were disrupted or curtailed in our countries due to COVID-19 measures, which contributed to the increase in cases of violence against women and girls.

DIAGRAM 2: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RELEVANT GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS*



*The framework was adopted from the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/category/covid-19/>

As discussed in preceding sections, during the past fiscal year, the negative consequences of the pandemic have escalated and become more complex. These complexities are not only a result of turbulent economic shocks and more pronounced income inequalities, but also due to the increased fragilities caused by poor governance, protracted civil wars, conflicts, displacements and natural calamities.

Therefore, the context of the COVID-19 pandemic across our six operational countries has necessitated the continuous repurposing of our program priorities and adjusting of our original annual KPIs. This, in turn, resulted in the optimization of our resource allocations and maximized our program impact by implementing COVID-19-focused responses aligned with our four interrelated priority areas, as agreed by the ChildFund Alliance.

Children Believe is a member of ChildFund Alliance, a global network of 12 child-focused development organizations working to create opportunities for children and youth, their families and communities. ChildFund helps nearly 23-million children and their families in more than 70 countries overcome poverty and underlying conditions that prevent children from achieving their full potential.

The four priorities include:

1. Stopping COVID-19 from infecting children and families;
2. Ensuring children get the food they need;
3. Keeping children and women safe from violence, physically and emotionally; and
4. Helping children continue learning.



In Ghana, personal protective equipment was distributed to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

III—OUR COVID-19 RESPONSES AND ACHIEVEMENTS DURING FY21

PROGRAM PRIORITIES AND REACH

Table 1 shows Children Believe’s COVID-19-focused program priorities implemented across our six countries of operation during the past 12 months.

TABLE 1: COVID-19 RESPONSE PRIORITY AREAS, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY

Priority	BFASO	ETH	GHA	IND	NIC	PAR
Stopping COVID-19 from infecting children and families	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ensuring children get the food they need	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Keeping children and women safe from violence, physically and emotionally	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Helping children continue learning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

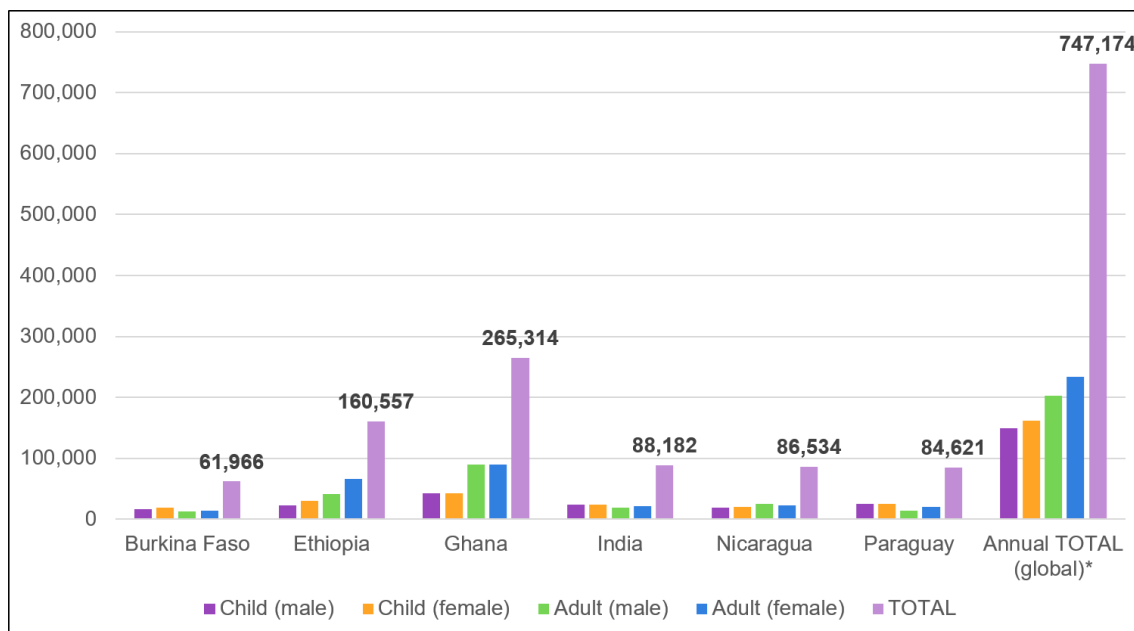
In line with our mission, children and women are central to all of our programming and this was amply demonstrated in our COVID-19 response. Our program supported children facing a range of life situations. Their varying situations are listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2: GROUPS OF CHILDREN THAT CHILDREN BELIEVE WORKED WITH, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY

Group of children	BFASO	ETH	GHA	IND	NIC	PAR
Children enrolled in school	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Children with disabilities	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Marginalized children	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Girls who face gender-specific barriers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Children at risk of abuse	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Child labourers	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Children not enrolled in school	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Ethnic/religious minority children	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Child refugees/internally displaced children	✓	✓				

Over the reporting period, the total number of people who benefited from our various COVID-19 interventions was 747,174 (Chart 1a). From this total, 310,941 were children (52 percent girls) and 436,233 were adults (54 percent women).

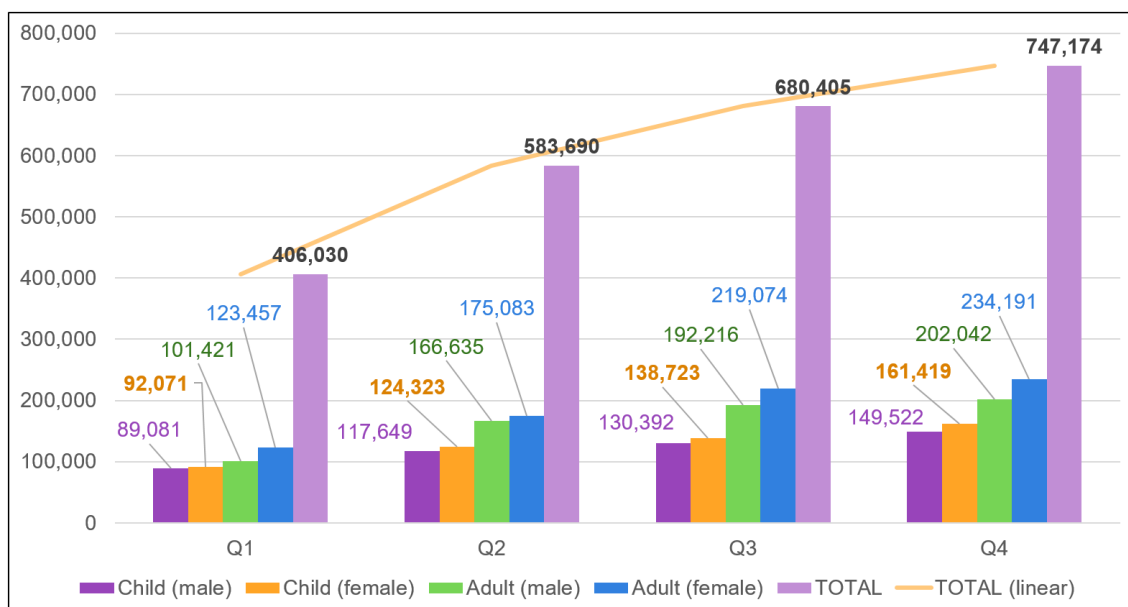
CHART 1A: DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS REACHED BY CHILDREN BELIEVE'S COVID-19 RESPONSE, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY*



**Annual TOTAL (global)* refers to annual cumulative results for the six countries where we work.

As the year progressed, we were able to expand the reach of our initiatives in our countries. This led to an upward trajectory of the total number of people we supported over FY21, as illustrated in Chart 1b.

CHART 1B: DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS REACHED BY CHILDREN BELIEVE'S COVID-19 RESPONSE, DISAGGREGATED BY FISCAL QUARTER



SAVING LIVES

Children Believe worked with 27 local partners to stop the spread of COVID-19 among the poorest communities where we work and ensured that children, women and vulnerable families were given relevant, rapid and adequate

lifesaving preventive measures. The awareness-creation and prevention interventions included actions such as the installation of community handwashing stands, provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) and supplies, and distribution of various communication materials focused on promoting behavioural change (Table 3).

TABLE 3: TYPES OF COVID-19-PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS IMPLEMENTED, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY

Type of intervention	BFASO	ETH	GHA	IND	NIC	PAR
Installing community handwashing stands	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Educating communities about symptoms, hygiene measures and where to get tested or treatment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Distributing soap, hand sanitizer, gloves and masks to families and front-line health workers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Creating child-friendly spaces with age-appropriate toys and education materials	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

Children Believe also supported healthcare services and preventive health practices by equipping local health facilities with basic materials and supplies, and extended training and incentives to local healthcare staff to maintain

their services, especially in remote areas. Table 4 shows the scope of the awareness, supplies and training delivered through health, education and community-based efforts to improve hygiene practices.

TABLE 4: TYPES OF AWARENESS, SUPPLIES AND MATERIALS MOBILIZED AND DELIVERED, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY

Awareness, supplies and training	BFASO	ETH	GHA	IND	PAR	NIC	TOTAL
# of child-friendly education materials distributed (posters, handouts, etc.)	2,345	805	16,242	32,000	12,350	300	63,742
# of virtual awareness campaigns conducted through radio, TV, social media, etc.	4	109	173	2,448	201	28	2,935
# of education facilities provided with handwashing stands or stations	66	65	54	5	42	111	343
# of health facilities provided with disinfection equipment and resources	18	36	35	49	8	15	161
# of health workers who participated in health or hygiene training	10	187	86	97	-	118	498

Overall, 63,742 child-friendly, COVID-19-focused educational materials were distributed. Additionally, 2,935 community awareness sessions were held in local languages through FM/community radio, TV spots, automobile loudspeakers, WhatsApp, text messages, Zoom meetings, mobile phone audio messages, flyers and posters across Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Nicaragua and Paraguay.

We also provided 343 educational facilities and 161 health facilities with both PPE and sanitary kits to enhance awareness and promote COVID-19 prevention. PPE kits included masks, gloves and body covers, while sanitary kits included soap, hand sanitizer and rubbing alcohol. As well, our staff and partners trained 498 healthcare workers (308 females) on World Health Organization (WHO) protocols and testing for COVID-19.

PROTECTING LIVELIHOODS

Children Believe worked with local partners to increase the availability and access of immediate-relief assistance and essential items, primarily for vulnerable children, women and families, to address malnutrition and protect livelihoods. While all offices in our program countries introduced and distributed food and other basic supplies,

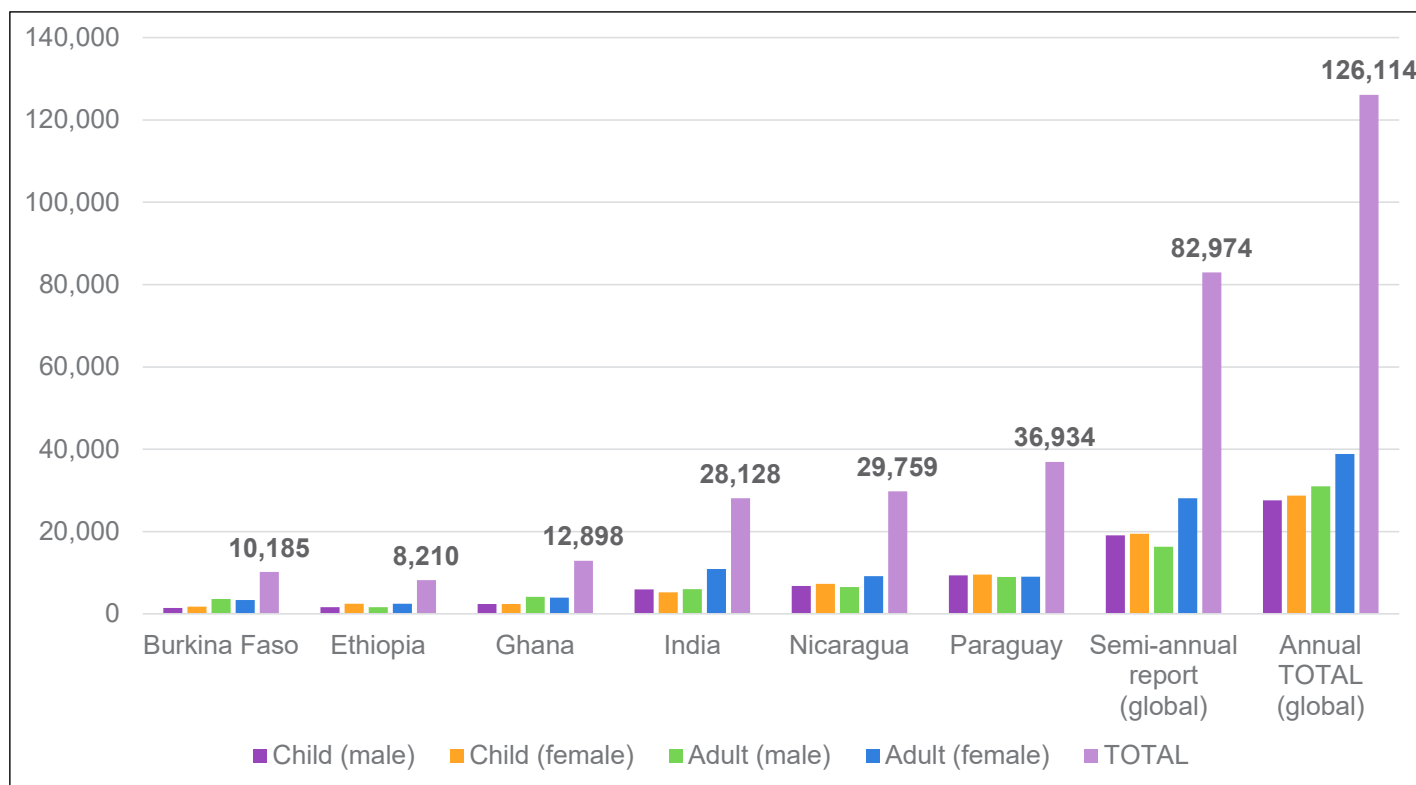
Burkina Faso and Ethiopia also injected cash for relief to the most vulnerable families, allowing them to buy food and overcome hunger (Table 5)

Children Believe provided cash, vouchers or food rations to 126,114 people (67,583 female), representing primarily sponsored-child families and the most vulnerable community members (Chart 2).

TABLE 5: TYPES OF LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT EXTENDED TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY

Types of livelihood support	BFASO	ETH	GHA	IND	NIC	PAR
Distributing food and other basic supplies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Providing cash relief for families	✓	✓				

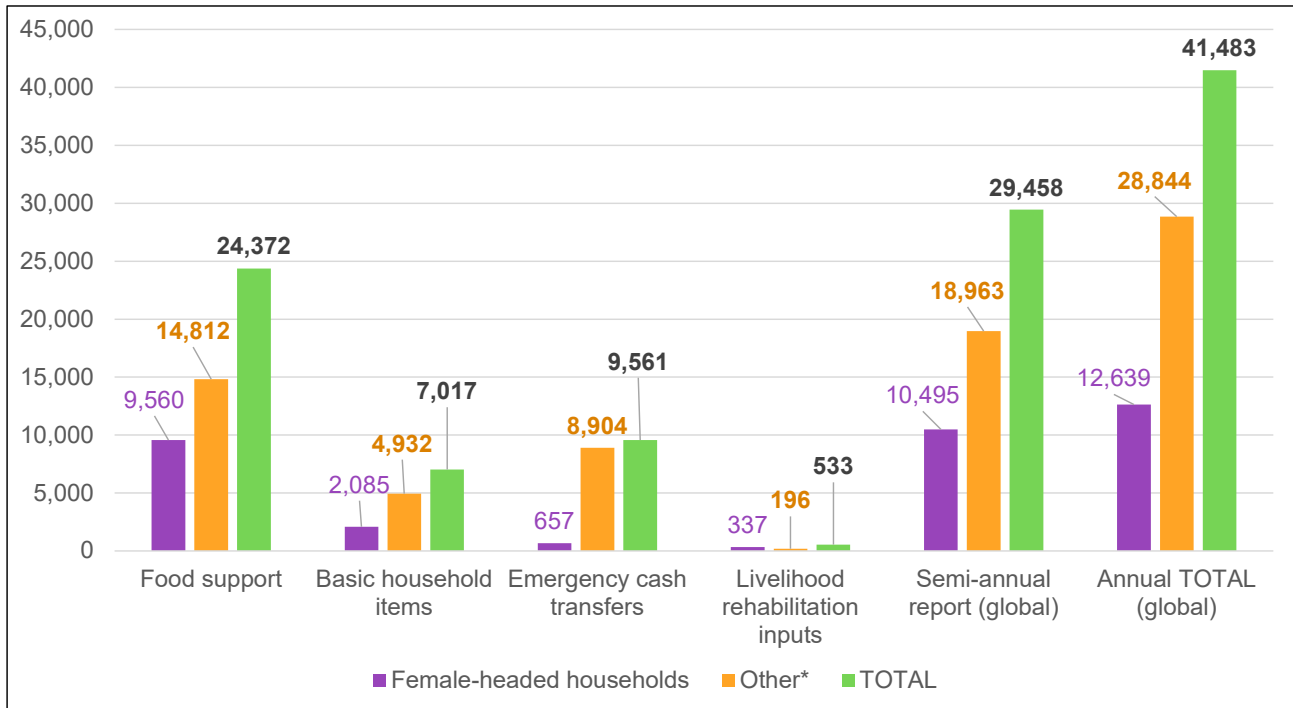
CHART 2: CHILDREN AND FAMILIES REACHED WITH FOOD OR CASH SUPPORT, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY



Over the reporting period, a total of 41,483 families (41 percent female-headed) benefited from the various types of livelihood support we provided (Chart 3). Fifty-nine percent of

the families (24,372 of the total number of families) received monthly dry food rations (rice, wheat flour, oil, pasta and other supplementary food) needed urgently to survive.

CHART 3: DISTRIBUTION OF FAMILIES ASSISTED, DISAGGREGATED BY TYPES OF LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT



Other refers to male-headed or child-headed households.



Arlen and her youngest son prepare a meal from a food pack provided by Children Believe. Arlen is one of many parents who needed support when she was unable to work due to COVID-19 restrictions.

PROTECTING CHILDREN AND WOMEN FROM VIOLENCE

Reducing and mitigating the potential threat of violence to children and women as a result of COVID-19 impacts was an important area of focus for our work. Whether due to loss or separation from primary caregivers, loss of protection services,

limited access to community supports, disruption to family income and social connections, fear and anxiety caused by the pandemic or the general rise in violence, protection measures were employed. The reported cases of violence against children and women were among non-sponsored children and their families, and their perpetrators were mostly intimate persons to the families. Table 6 lists the forms of violence addressed by our six countries of operation.

TABLE 6: FORMS OF VIOLENCE REPORTED AND ADDRESSED BY COUNTRY PROGRAMS

Form of violence/exploitation	BFASO	ETH	GHA	IND	NIC	PAR
Child marriage	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Early pregnancy	✓		✓		✓	✓
Sexual violence	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Rape	✓	✓		✓		
Corporal punishment		✓			✓	✓
Labour exploitation/child labour		✓		✓		✓
Gender-based violence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Citizenship insecurity	✓	✓			✓	✓
Domestic violence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stigmatization and discrimination due to infection with COVID-19	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

To address these forms of violence, Children Believe collaborated with local governments to strengthen community-based child protection programs. These programs are important for reducing the vulnerabilities of children facing discrimination due to caste/ethnic identity, disability, forced migration/displacement or difficult circumstances,

such as homelessness. Our efforts also sought to reduce stigmatization and discrimination against children diagnosed with COVID-19, and/or children whose caregivers may have suffered or died from COVID-19. Table 7 lists the variety of activities implemented in each of our countries to help protect children and women.

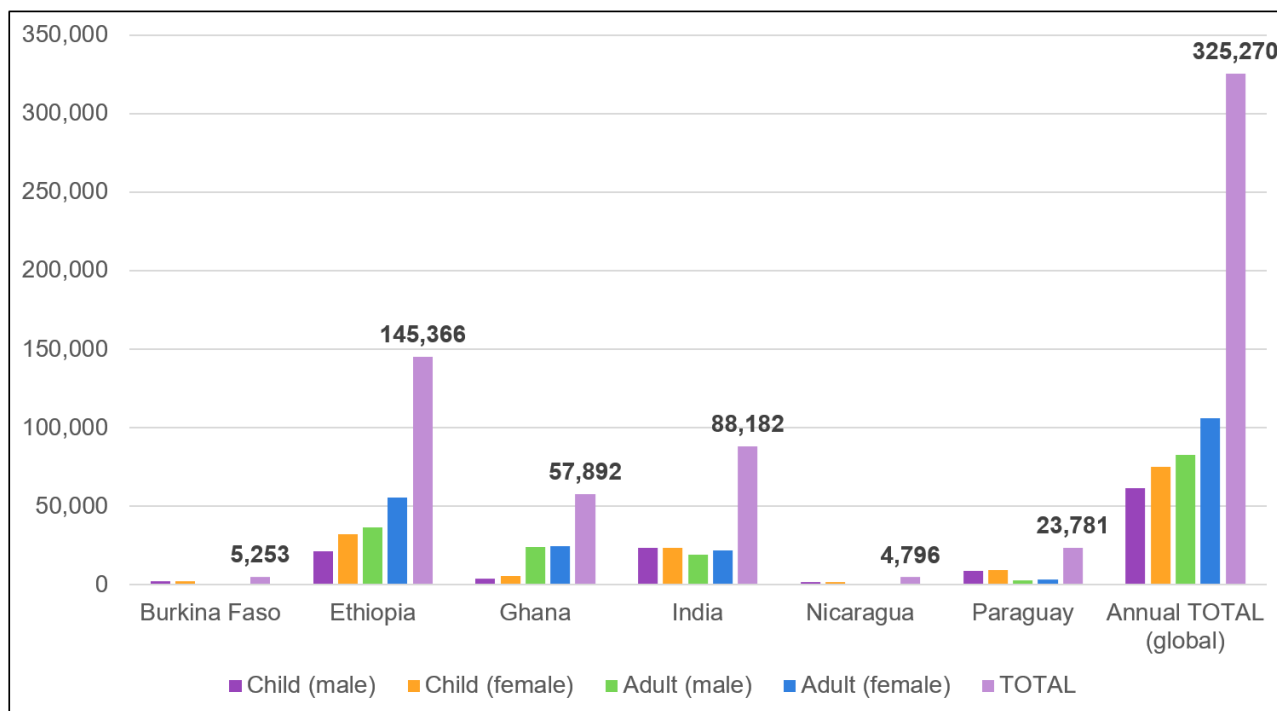
TABLE 7: TYPES OF ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED BY COUNTRY PROGRAMS TO KEEP CHILDREN AND WOMEN SAFE FROM VIOLENCE

Activities to keep children and women safe	BFASO	ETH	GHA	IND	NIC	PAR
Supporting community-based child protection systems that identify, respond to and refer cases of abuse, neglect, violence or exploitation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Providing virtual/online psychological first aid and counselling		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Supporting temporary shelters for children who live on the street	✓					
Arranging safe and appropriate care for children separated from their caregivers	✓					

Children Believe worked with partners to design and implement programs and services in the context of the growing risks appearing in the shadow of COVID-19 and to address the surge in gender-based violence (GBV). All of our community awareness-education programs encompassed GBV and advised on how community leaders, caregivers and children

should prevent and report the issue. Our country offices and their partners worked with local law enforcement bodies to bring abusers to justice, while ensuring access to psychosocial counselling services for victims. Overall, Children Believe reached over 325,270 people and enabled them to prevent or be protected from various forms of violence (Chart 4).

CHART 4: ADULTS AND CHILDREN REACHED THROUGH VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND PROTECTION INITIATIVES, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY



BOX 1: ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND WOMEN DURING COVID-19 – THE STORY OF T

T, a 13-year-old girl living in Adama in the Oromia region of Ethiopia, is one of hundreds of girls who experienced rape during the COVID-19 lockdown by men in their neighborhoods. This was a traumatic incident for T and her parents.

The incident came to the attention of one of her school peers, FB. FB is a 15-year-old boy who is active in the local child protection club established by Children Believe and a local partner. Through his involvement with the club, he knew what steps to take and reported the rape to a local women’s rights organization called the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association. The organization, in turn, immediately contacted T and referred her to the One Stop Centre where a police investigation was launched for her case, and where she had access to psychosocial counselling, medical care and legal services.

While T was receiving medical and psychological rehabilitation to support her recovery, the local Police Chief, in collaboration with Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, took T’s perpetrator to court. After the Court had completed a full examination of the case, reviewed the medical evidence and heard from all of the witness, the Court found the man guilty, sentencing him to 15 years in jail with no parole. The Court’s decision and the support she received from the network of local child protection actors aided in providing T and her family with a sense of security and justice.

CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION

Children Believe worked to maintain the continuity of education for children during the lockdown through various mechanisms, and particularly focusing on the needs of girls.

Table 8 identifies the methods we applied in our operating countries, including accessing virtual and alternative learning/ education platforms, radio and TV spots, flash drives and printed material.

TABLE 8: DISTRIBUTION OF ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED TO MAINTAIN CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY

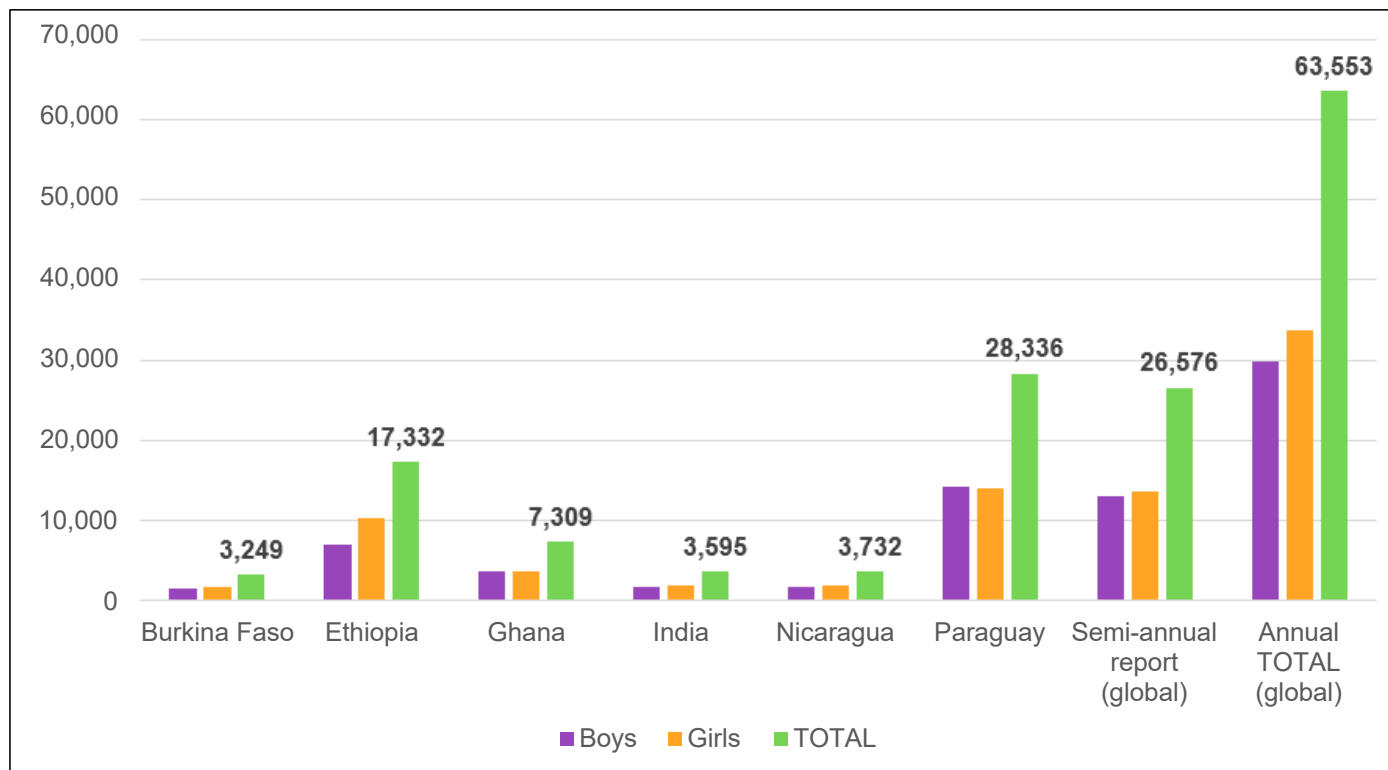
Activities to maintain continuity of education	BFASO	ETH	GHA	IND	NIC	PAR
Conducting activities and tutoring over phone, online or through radio, TV spots, flash drives	✓				✓	✓
Distributing home learning materials and guidelines	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

We collaborated with ministries of education to help primary school children access education and partnered with education actors on alternative or innovative learning methods to sustain educational gains. In particular, we arranged special supports for adolescent girls to motivate them to continue their education while protecting them from risks such as child labour, early marriage or teen pregnancy, which threatened to increase due to the pandemic.

All of the children engaged were provided with creative aids (arts and crafts materials) and learning aids (books, printed materials and notebooks) to help them continue learning.

Chart 5 illustrates that a total of 63,553 students (33,659 girls) were reached across our six countries through our education efforts.

CHART 5: CHILDREN REACHED TO SUPPORT THEIR CONTINUED EDUCATION, DISAGGREGATED BY COUNTRY



Young girls in Paraguay participated in a virtual talent festival. It was one of many ways education was adapted to ensure learning could continue through the COVID-19 pandemic.

IV—KEY LESSONS FROM OUR FIELD PRACTICES

In this section, we highlight the main lessons we learned from designing and implementing our COVID-19 response program across our six countries of operation.

- **Having local partnerships established prior to COVID-19 aided a rapid response to the pandemic.** Children Believe has always worked with and through local partners to nurture and build the capacities of grassroots organizations/community groups. The partnerships we established prior to the pandemic enabled us to jump-start our COVID-19 response initiatives across our six countries, rapidly respond to the COVID-19 outbreaks and gain access to several hard-to-reach communities.
- **Strong collaborations and positive rapport with local governments and line departments were key to the success of our response.** Children Believe capitalized on pre-existing positive relationships with local government bodies, notably bolstering our alliances with health departments and other gender/child/youth affairs offices across our operational countries, as we responded to the pandemic. This helped create a conducive environment for collaboration and opportunities to share resources to address specific gaps in the state's COVID-19 response.
- **The flexibility of core-budget/sponsorship funding facilitated adaptive programming and budget planning.** Children Believe enjoyed the support of committed individual sponsors who were flexible with the use of their funding, for the purpose of serving the best interests of children and their families. This allowed us to respond to urgent needs and COVID-19-prompted priorities. The flexibility of institutional donors, such as Global Affairs Canada and UNICEF, was also beneficial as we were able to repurpose grant-based projects to continue their operation without major disruptions.
- **Interventions in assuring the continuity of education were crucial to prevent school dropouts, especially among girls, and restore hope for the future.** Children Believe and our partners recognized the need to address

the disruption in education, without which its consequences could damage the future of human capital. Accordingly, the schools in our operational countries were well supported with their reopening plans. The reprioritization of budgets and the implementation of program interventions that improved basic handwashing services, namely providing water facilities and soap or sanitizer, were crucial investments to facilitate the safe reopening of schools in the midst of the pandemic.

Safer school environments contributed to the continuity of education in remote communities and increased the likelihood of girls returning to school.

- **Narrowing the digital divide in education and increasing access to alternative, non-formal education mechanisms is not an option, but critical during lockdowns and in the post-COVID-19 context.** Children Believe and our partners across our six implementing countries worked to increase access to fast and reliable internet connections or technology in communities wherever possible. Alternatively, especially in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Ghana, students were encouraged and gained support to access educational media to ensure continuity of education and promote awareness-creation programs. This mostly involved FM radios, which are more accessible in fragile contexts. Most of our operational offices and local partners received assistance in developing virtual platforms and, wherever available, using smartphone applications to engage children and youth during the lockdown.

In the post-COVID 19 context, Children Believe and our partners will continue to explore the use of new education technology as well as partnerships to promote learning and address the digital divide.

- **Strengthening local child protection systems was essential to urgently reverse the increasing trend of gender-based violence.** COVID-19 has brought a worrying trend of increased gender-based violence and the temptation to push girls into child marriage. Girls' dropout rates from school increased as school closures continued.

Children Believe and our partners were able to monitor and strengthen local child protection systems through incentivizing local police, administrators, women and youth associations, teachers, health workers, pro-bono paralegal service providers, extension workers and volunteers.

These measures are instrumental for the continuation of services from multiple local stakeholders and to increase their capacities in preparing for, responding to and preventing violence against girls and young women, including early marriage, rape, abduction, sexual exploitation, child trafficking and labour exploitation, which are prevalent across the countries where we work.

- **Addressing the high cost of living, economic shocks and youth unemployment are as critical as mitigating the virus.** The lack of employment opportunities and the rising cost of living have become major sources of concern for children and youth in many of our supported communities. The effects of COVID-19, coupled with conflict and displacement, have increased food and financial insecurity. This has contributed to elevated levels of hunger, malnutrition and risk to the mental health and well-being of children in countries such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and India. Such conditions are also a push factor for irregular migration. The injection of cash or food assistance and the integration of local food safety nets for the most vulnerable families proved to have significant positive effects on improving livelihoods and rebuilding a sense of hope for the future for marginalized children and youth. Given the negative impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods, Children Believe and our partners need

to continue addressing urgent humanitarian needs through scaling up cash or food support as part of our COVID-19 relief efforts.

- **Strengthening youth leadership and volunteerism are key to social cohesion and promoting partnerships with youth for change.** The response to the COVID-19 pandemic ignited the spirit of volunteerism and actions of mutual support, especially among youth groups at the grassroots level. We observed incredible voluntary initiatives by youth groups to prevent COVID-19 and support vulnerable families and senior citizens. Enhancing youth mobilization and promoting youth voluntary services were key to preventing the negative consequences of the pandemic and restoring youth confidence in being able to shape their future and that of their communities.
- **Rearranging internal coordination for greater efficacy.** At the beginning of the pandemic, an internal coordination mechanism was set up with key functional leaders meeting to resolve issues and brainstorm solutions. This was greatly effective for internal coordination and timely response and decision-making. In addition, the program and policy senior leadership team met to mutually share, learn and problem solve.
- **Enhancing COVID-19 data collection and tracking.** As we moved through the pandemic, there was increasing demand for frequent collection of COVID-19 data, tracking and timely sharing of information from all of our operating offices, partners and other key government stakeholders.

Weekly and bi-weekly situational update reports were developed and used to track pandemic trends and prepare mitigation and response plans, primarily targeting our sponsored children, their families and vulnerable community members.

Due to the repurposing of our program plan and follow-up, we were able to amend and develop COVID-19-focused performance indicators within the overall Performance Measurement Framework of our Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Knowledge Sharing (MELKS) system.

V—FUNDING SOURCES

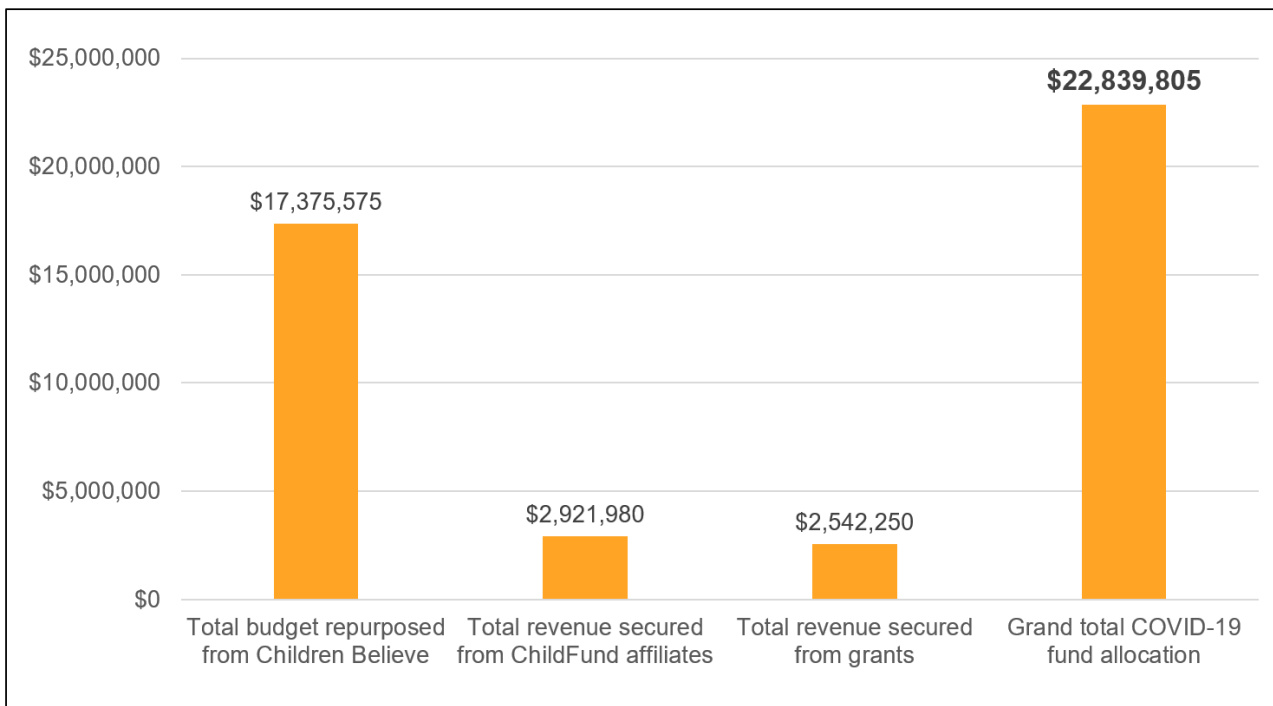
Over FY21, Children Believe repurposed or mobilized a total of \$23 million CDN to design and implement a COVID-19 response program. The aim of the program was to stop COVID-19 from infecting children and families, ensuring vulnerable children and families would get the food they need, keeping children and women safe from violence, and helping children continue learning. The sources of funding and dollar amounts are broken down in Chart 6.

Children Believe deeply appreciates the increased levels of flexibility provided by our sponsors and institutional resource partners, whom supported our COVID-19 response.



To maintain good health and a safe environment, young students in Ethiopia use a handwashing station provided by Children Believe.

CHART 6: FY21 COVID-19 RESPONSE FUNDING SOURCES*



*Amounts are in Canadian dollars. The total does not include \$3.1 million in gifts-in-kind.

VI—LOOKING FORWARD

Proceeding through FY22 and recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to put a strain on the lives and livelihoods of children and families, we will build on the lessons we have learned in FY21. Children, youth and women in the most vulnerable contexts are still being exposed to extreme poverty, inequality, suffering and stress. Further, the continued disruption of education has exacerbated violence against children and women. In our effort to reverse these adverse effects, we are aware of the need for a holistic program response that builds the resilience capacities of children, youth, women and families within our supported communities.

We will intensify our public health-promotion work and increase the capacities of local stakeholders to maximize access to COVID-19 vaccines. This will be accomplished through the COVAX accelerator tool for the distribution and deployment of vaccines in poor and fragile contexts.

We will tap into new opportunities for accessing and promoting digital technologies and e-learning products/ platforms, specifically to enhance continuity of education/ distance learning for children and youth skills development, across the countries where we work. As well, new resources and opportunities to strengthen our partnerships with private sector and knowledge- and digital technology-based entities will be explored to support skills building for youth employability and entrepreneurship.

Recognizing the widespread loss of income, massive drops in remittances and limited access to social safety nets that are driving large numbers of people into vulnerability, we will mobilize new and more resources to scale up our humanitarian response capacities to address the food, financial and other basic needs of children, women and families affected by the pandemic.

Finally, to reinforce these efforts, we will increase our security-preparedness plans amid the increasing political or military tensions in our particularly fragile countries of operation, namely in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Nicaragua. Doing so will help us sustain the continuity of our program work moving forward with little to no disruption.



A young child in Nicaragua smiling while holding food and other supplies provided by Children Believe.



Children Believe works globally to empower children to dream fearlessly, stand up for what they believe in – and be heard. For 60+ years, we’ve brought together brave young dreamers, caring supporters and partners, and unabashed idealists. Together, we’re driven by a common belief: creating access to education – inside and outside of classrooms – is the most powerful tool children can use to change their world.

A member of ChildFund Alliance, Children Believe is part of a global network of 12 child-focused development organizations working to create opportunities for children and youth, their families and communities. ChildFund helps nearly 23-million children and their families in more than 70 countries overcome poverty and underlying conditions that prevent children from achieving their full potential. We work to end violence against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and engage children and youth to create lasting change and elevate their voices in decisions that affect their lives.

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