

COVID-19 & THE EXTREME POOR

WHY THE POOR MAY BE HIT THE HARDEST

SECOND EDITION



SUMMER 2020

BRIGHT HOPE®

Dear Bright Hope Ally,

Pandemic. Virus. Disaster. Lockdown. Unemployment. Infection rates. Death tolls.

These are all scary and emotionally charged words used by the media to get a reaction from you and me. I wonder if the Israelites had headlines circulating as they ran from Egypt.... 10 plagues, blood on doorposts, firstborn will die, Pharaoh's army, escape, desert wandering.

When the Israelites left Egypt, God wanted His people to learn to worship only Him, obey some new rules, and most of all, trust Him for their daily needs. He repeatedly told the Israelites not to fear, to have courage, and obey His commands.

If you had asked me on March 16, 2020, what the poor would be experiencing today, I would have told you, disease and dying from illness. **But that is not the case in most of the poverty-stricken world. What they are experiencing is hunger and food insecurity.**

Just like you, I am listening for God in the details as updates and hard facts cross my desk each day. The horizon still seems quite fuzzy and unclear, it is hard to say what the next 60 or 90 days will be like, but that is okay. **Our God has the map, and He knows where we are going.**

As you read this updated version of COVID-19 and the Extreme Poor, don't get scared or feel manipulated into action. We want you to have the facts and stories of the real struggles the poor face. God will tell you what to do next, just like the Israelites.

Spread Jesus, not germs.



C.H. Dyer
President & CEO, Bright Hope

P.S. Please pass this booklet onto one Christian friend from church.

FOOD SECURITY

NIGERIA

In March, when anxieties began to rise over COVID-19, Americans did everything they could to prepare for the worst. Shoppers stocked up on food, toilet paper, and cleaning supplies. For those at risk of losing their jobs, many had at least a small savings to keep them afloat. Many qualified for employment benefits and most received a stimulus check. But in countries like Nigeria, such provisions were not a reality.

African nations enacted various levels of lockdown to slow the spread of the coronavirus. When people are confined to their homes, it's nearly impossible for them to make a living selling foods and services in the local markets. With no income, it's been a challenge to feed their families during lockdown.

COVID-19 is scary, yet the fear of starvation is terrifying!

Cecilia Achonwa owns what used to be a bustling restaurant near Lagos, Nigeria. Once the city went on lockdown, she had no income or way to support her family.

Residents have feared the worst. Abiodun Gaji lamented, "People are hungry... millions of people depend on daily sales. If they don't make sales, they don't eat."¹

KENYA

Hunger is already a familiar foe for many slum residents, but flattening-the-curve measures like closing schools are unfortunately causing more children to go hungry.

Many schools, in slum communities, offer feeding programs, and there are millions of children who rely on them for nourishment twice a day. However, in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19, Kenyan schools have closed, meaning children have been cut off from their primary source of food, and the burden falls back on their parents, who already live on the brink of disaster.



**"ASK THE LORD TO PROTECT US DURING THIS OUTBREAK
BECAUSE THE COUNTRY IS NOT READY TO COUNTERACT COVID-19."
--- PRAYER REQUEST FROM HAITI ---**

1. <https://www.erieneowl.com/story/41956887/we-dont-work-we-dont-eat-informal-workers-face-stark-choices-as-africas-largest-megacity-shuts-down>

MEDICAL AND SANITATION

HAITI

The Haitian health care system is in a constant state of strain. Even without a crisis like the quickly-spreading coronavirus, Haiti's health care system struggles to provide affordable care for its citizens.

Thankfully the spread of COVID-19 has been slow in Haiti. This is good news for those who live in rural areas (more than 50% of the population) and would struggle to get to a hospital if they were to get sick. For those who could find transportation, there is still the question of whether there would be enough test kits, beds, and ventilators for the number of people who could potentially need them. **For the nearly 11 million Haitians, there are only about 30 ICU beds!**²

People with severe coronavirus and pneumonia need oxygen! In the U.S., thanks to oxygen generators, oxygen is pumped through ventilators. Haitian hospitals, on the other hand, have no ventilators for patients. They also lack IV solution, space to separate patients, and protective gear for medical professionals. There is also a huge shortage of healthcare workers, roughly **seven for every 1,000** people, compared to America where there are **25 healthcare workers per 1,000 people**.

KENYAN SLUMS

Another added challenge to health and COVID-19 prevention is access to water and good sanitation.

Dark trickling, filth-filled water runs freely in the dirt streets of urban slums like Mathare, in Nairobi. Sanitation is clearly an issue. **In general, households do not have indoor plumbing or electricity.** Some people simply go to the bathroom in a plastic bag and fling it anywhere.

Only "36% of households in [slums] have access to in-house or in-compound piped drinking water," compared to 84% in "formal settlements," according to a study by a New York professor.

Most residents in these slums don't have indoor plumbing. They take buckets and plastic containers to a public water source, perhaps pay for the water, and then haul their heavy loads back home. It may or may not be clean. They may have to add a chlorine treatment or boil it before drinking it. **They have to do this every day.**

--- THERE IS NO SAFE PLACE FOR THESE VULNERABLE PEOPLE TO ESCAPE TO.

SEE THE DIFFERENCE...

FACT: WE'VE BEEN TOLD TO WASH OUR HANDS FREQUENTLY

Water is a scarce commodity already, and they have to go out in public to buy it and haul it back to their home every day in heavy jugs and buckets.



SOCIAL DISTANCING

AFRICA

As COVID-19 has crept into almost every country across the globe, much of the same prevention advice can be heard regardless of what country you call home—whether it's the United States, Bolivia, or Uganda. Stay home, practice social distancing, and wash your hands frequently with soap and water.

However, depending on where you live, some of these vitally important precautions are impossible. To understand this better, it's helpful to get a glimpse of what life is like in some impoverished communities in developing nations.

Approximately 2.5 million Kenyans live in the densely populated slums of Nairobi, Kenya. In one slum, Mathare Valley, about 600,000 people live in area of land only about 1.2 by .2 miles wide. **Just knowing that much, the problem of social distancing becomes clear.** Entire families, six or seven people, live in one room—6x8, 10x10 or 12x12. Their neighbors are crowded together a foot or two apart.³

Small villages and rural communities face different obstacles than urban slums when it comes to social distancing. Thankfully, people are more spread out, though children in Uganda are used to roaming freely and trying to keep them home has been a challenge. In many cases, rural farming families have had some home-grown food to live off of, but some impoverished families have become quite desperate. On top of COVID-19 restrictions, some African regions are also suffering from droughts and flooding. This is creating an even greater lack of food not only now, but in the coming months because farmers will have no crops to harvest. In Uganda, our church partners have been able to get food and soap to the elderly and most needy families.



SEE THE DIFFERENCE...

**FACT: WE'VE BEEN TOLD TO STAY HOME
AND PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING**

But did you know that a family of 5 often lives in one 10x10 room—with no bathroom, no water supply, no refrigerator? It's impossible to socially isolate.

"PRAY FOR ALL LEADERS CURRENTLY WORKING ON THIS SITUATION AND FOR THE RESPONDERS ON THE FRONTLINES, SUCH AS MEDICAL PERSONNEL."

--- PRAYER REQUEST FROM UGANDA ---

MILLIONS MORE EXTREME POOR BECAUSE OF COVID-19

For eight weeks, many of us have watched the news, worrying about what might happen if the coronavirus started to spread among the extreme poor. With weak healthcare systems and few qualified medical staff, COVID-19 would surely devastate less developed nations! So far, however, what we dreaded has not come to pass.

Unfortunately, another reality threatens to overtake the world in the wake of this pandemic: **a HUGE increase in the number of extreme poor around the world.**

The greatest current threat to the poor is not the coronavirus itself, but the economic gridlock caused by government restrictions meant to slow the virus' spread. Poor families around the world depend on day-labor jobs, subsistence farming, and small businesses to make ends meet. But with stay-at-home orders preventing them from finding work, selling goods and services, and purchasing seeds to plant, they are falling into an even deeper pit of poverty.

With no access to savings, paid time off, or the ability to stockpile food and medicine during COVID-19 lockdowns, the numbers of extreme poor around the world will skyrocket!

The problem for the extreme poor (those who live on less than \$1.90 per day) falls into two main categories: income/jobs and food security.

INCOME/JOB

The extreme poor often do not have education or opportunities to find even moderate-paying jobs. They find themselves depending on short-term manual labor or domestic work to survive. Because of pandemic restrictions and the resulting financial stress, these jobs have largely disappeared.

Also, since COVID-19 has forced people to stay home, "the pandemic will disproportionately hurt those holding low-skilled, low-wage jobs."⁴



FOOD SECURITY

Even without a pandemic to worry about, the extreme poor always struggle to provide enough food for their families. Many extremely poor families must supplement their incomes with personal gardens or small farms.

Because of COVID-19's effect on the economy, importing food will become more expensive for many countries. As a result, the agricultural sector in many poor nations may increase as families become more dependent on growing their own food.⁵

At the same time, the incomes of poor families will also decrease as many low-wage jobs disappear. Without income to purchase seeds, agricultural equipment, fertilizer, etc., the number of subsistence farms will likely increase. Subsistence farming, however, barely provides enough food for consumption and little or no extra income.

HOW MANY MORE PEOPLE WILL FALL INTO EXTREME POVERTY?

Experts may disagree on the details but they all agree on one thing: **the fallout from COVID-19 will plunge at least tens of millions more human beings into extreme poverty!**

According to the charity Oxfam, which is based in Nairobi, the pandemic may turn back the clock on thirty years of economic progress, setting the whole world back to Depression-era economics. And the global economic crisis caused by COVID-19 could pull hundreds of million more people below the international poverty lines.

- The number of poor (who live on less \$5.50 per day) could increase by 548 million
- The number of extreme poor (who live on less than \$1.90 per day) could increase by 434 million⁶

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects that COVID-19 will produce 34.3 million more extremely poor individuals in 2020 and 130 million more by 2030. But the majority of these people (56%) will be on the African continent.⁷

As the world marches toward a global depression (on par with the Great Depression), the global economy may shrink by more than \$8.5 trillion. This will disproportionately affect poor countries. "Commodity and tourism sectors had taken a major hit, along with transportation and manufacturing sectors, turning millions jobless across the planet in a matter of weeks."⁸

The church is the most effective, best-designed organization to tackle extreme poverty. God calls believers to consider the needs of others before their own (Phil. 2:3-7), and share everything (Acts 2:44-47) so that no one gets left behind!⁹

4. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-13/pandemic-may-push-130-million-people-to-extreme-poverty-un-says>
5. <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/poverty-and-food-insecurity-could-grow-dramatically-covid-19-spreads>
6. <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/coronavirus-crisis-could-plunge-half-a-billion-people-into-poverty-oxfam-2020-04-08>
7. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-13/pandemic-may-push-130-million-people-to-extreme-poverty-un-says>
8. <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/un-covid-19-could-push-34-million-extreme-poverty>
9. <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/world/church-leaders-key-to-tackling-covid-19-in-vulnerable-communities/>

HOW HAVE THE POOR BEEN IMPACTED BY COVID-19 LOCKDOWNS?

"In Africa, 85 percent of those who have been forced to stay home said they are either skipping meals or eating less because of the lockdowns," a UN director recently told the World Health Organization (WHO). ¹⁰

Headlines tell a grim story of the toll being taken around the world. It's more than just the physical health effects of the actual coronavirus, it's the ramifications of lockdowns and other preventative measures.

Here are just a few troubling headlines:

- Hunger could be more deadly than coronavirus in poorer countries (*Washington Post*)
- In Uganda, mothers in labour die amidst coronavirus lockdown (*Reuters*)
- Stampede in Kenya as slum residents surge for food aid (*NBC*)
- A New Covid-19 Crisis: Domestic Abuse Rises Worldwide (*The New York Times*)
- 'Killing in the name of corona': Death toll soars from Kenya's curfew crackdown (*Washington Post*)

Many developing nations were swift to impose strict lockdowns before there was a major outbreak or even one confirmed COVID-19 death in their country. But experts and concerned onlookers alike are concerned that the "cure" is worse than the coronavirus itself.

"When the lockdowns were put in place, we knew what would happen to food and income but we didn't put anything in place to mitigate the failure," Lawrence Haddad, executive director of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, told *The Washington Post*. "That's the big tragedy." ¹¹

"Perhaps lockdowns might not be the right strategy to deal with the pandemic in these countries," said Catia Batiste, an economics professor at Nova University, in the same article. "Copying the strategy of Western countries might not be the way to go."

But we realize it's a tough call either way. The quick responses of leaders in low- and middle-income nations may have slowed the spread of COVID-19, but unfortunately, these lockdowns have also caused horrible suffering among the poor.

These are just some of the effects we're seeing:

HUNGER & MALNUTRITION

"Nearly 370 million children across 143 countries who normally rely on school meals for a reliable source of daily nutrition must now look to other sources as schools are shuttered," according to UNICEF. ¹²

Increased hunger may be one of the most widespread effects people in developing nations are suffering from as a result of COVID-19 prevention strategies. Whether from job loss that left people without money to buy food, or things like school feeding programs that were forced to stop under lockdown rules, millions of people are going hungry.

Also note that some people are now buying less nutritious food in order to stretch their money further. They stop purchasing things like meat, dairy and fresh vegetables which, for children, can result in stunted growth and learning problems, according to Haddad.

JOB LOSS (WITH NO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS)

With little forewarning, and no savings account, credit card, or unemployment benefits, tens of millions of informal workers (day laborers, street vendors, domestic workers, etc.) either lost their jobs completely or were in some way impacted when their governments imposed strict lockdowns. About 2 billion people work informally, mostly in developing nations.¹³

Most of these types of workers earn just enough money to buy a little food a day at a time—and these aren't the kinds of jobs that can be done remotely via Zoom. So when the government told them they couldn't work—drive their taxi, open their restaurant, sell goods on the street—they were immediately pushed to the very brink of survival.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Combine tension and fear, no job, little food, cramped living quarters, and confinement and it can be a formula for a domestic nightmare. Sadly, this is the situation millions of people around the world are living in while their country is on lockdown. As feared, there has been “a worldwide surge in domestic violence,” according to a *New York Times* article.¹⁴

Restrictions vary country to country, but in Bolivia, for example, individuals are allowed out of their home only once a week, for a maximum of four hours—all of which is tracked by their government ID number and being enforced by the Bolivian military. In situations like this when abusers and victims are forced to be in confinement together nearly 24/7—sometimes in only one room—unspeakable horrors can endure.

BANNED TRANSPORTATION LEAVES PEOPLE DEAD WITHOUT HOSPITAL ACCESS

Some nations banned all public transportation and movement of private vehicles without authorization. Uganda is one such country, but it's a country with few ambulances, and it's not easy for a private vehicle to get permission to be on the roads—even for a medical emergency. In some cases, residents don't even know who to call to get permission.

Consequently, there are heartbreaking reports of pregnant women in Kenya and Uganda who have died in labor because they either couldn't get anyone to take them to a hospital, or who died because they had no choice but to walk to a hospital.¹⁵

DELAYED OR SKIPPED VACCINATIONS

By the end of April, most countries around the world had halted or postponed polio and measles vaccination campaigns.¹⁶ Also in April, UNICEF reported that "over 117 million children in 37 countries may miss out on their measles vaccination."¹⁷

If that happens, "we could see even more outbreaks around the world than we saw last year, an even greater number of cases and even greater number of deaths," said Dr Kate O'Brien, the WHO's director of the Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals Programme.¹⁸

These are heavy, heartbreaking statistics. As Christians, we must pray and act on behalf of those who are suffering so severely. We pray that the Lord miraculously protects and provides for them. We pray that He would stir those who have means to reach out and help those without.

We must also pray for the leaders of these nations to have wisdom. As some countries start to loosen lockdown restrictions and reopen in some capacity (Uganda, Zambia and India being three examples) we pray that there is no widespread resurgence of cases.

10. www.washingtonpost.com/world/hunger-could-be-more-deadly-than-coronavirus-in-poorer-countries/2020/05/14/32fd3f9a-8bd3-11ea-80df-d24b35a568ae_story.html

11. www.washingtonpost.com/world/hunger-could-be-more-deadly-than-coronavirus-in-poorer-countries/2020/05/14/32fd3f9a-8bd3-11ea-80df-d24b35a568ae_story.html

12. www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-devastates-already-fragile-health-systems-over-6000-additional-children

13. news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061322

14. www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html

15. www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-uganda/in-uganda-mothers-in-labour-die-amidst-coronavirus-lockdown-idUSKCN21R2FA

16. www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/over-13-million-children-did-not-receive-any-vaccines-all-even-covid-19-disrupted

17. www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/covid-19-devastates-already-fragile-health-systems-over-6000-additional-children

18. news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1063002

WHEN PANDEMIC STRIKES THE POOR

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

BE FEARLESS: Fear can prevent God from being able to work through us. While we want to be wise, we don't want to allow fear to hold us back from any opportunity to minister to those in need throughout our neighborhood, country or even across the world.

Lydia is the wife of a man on staff at Bright Hope and is a nurse. Her job has required that she care for patients infected with COVID-19. She described how one patient was distraught because his family was not allowed to visit him. He was scared, sick and alone. While other workers were afraid to approach him, dressed in protective gear Lydia boldly walked up to him and held his hand. The patient started crying, sobbing as she compassionately spoke words of comfort and grace to him. While other caretakers paused at the man's door, she showed no fear and responded as God prompted her.

There are a lot of lonely and frightened people these days. God may prompt you to bring comfort or encouragement to someone. As Christians, we should always be open to ways we can remember those living in extreme poverty. Remembering them can be as simple as praying or giving.

BE PRAYING: Only God's miraculous hand will slow and keep this virus from spreading violently across the most impoverished communities of the world. At Bright Hope we share urgent prayer requests from the field [via text message](#) twice a month and update our [online prayer wall](#) with current prayer requests that make it simple for you to pray specifically for the poor.

BE GIVING: At this time, there is an opportunity to change a life and bring Hope to those caught in this pandemic and living in very poor communities. You can make a profound difference.

Few people are lonelier or more vulnerable than the extreme poor. With their lack of savings, food insecurity, inability to social distance, inadequate healthcare systems, and an absence of basic hygiene practices, they are indeed the most vulnerable in this horrific pandemic. (...Even the closest friend of the poor deserts him. Proverbs 19:4)

SEE THE DIFFERENCE...

FACT: WE'VE BEEN TOLD TO GET MEDICAL CARE IN CASES OF SERIOUS ILLNESS

Health care is minimal and often painfully inadequate in the best of times, let alone during a pandemic. There's a serious lack of equipment, supplies, pharmaceuticals and medical personnel to handle an influx of patients. Besides, people have no money to pay medical bills, the free hospital is far away, and they have no means of transportation. Even before a pandemic, slum residents have died on their way to the free hospital.



MOVING FORWARD

"If you make the Lord your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home. For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go."

--- PSALM 91:9-11---

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Your generous gift of \$30 or any other amount to Bright Hope's [Bright Hope's catalog](#) helps us reach impoverished families with important instruction about virus prevention, installation of handwashing stations and distribution of hygiene kits, food, and other necessities.

Bright Hope COVID-19 response projects:

- Handwashing stations installed in impoverished communities.
- Food distributed to groups in Kenya, Uganda, Haiti, Bolivia, and Zambia.
- Hygiene and sanitation training: We train pastors and church leaders about COVID-19 and how to prevent it with good hygiene practices.
- Emotional support and encouragement: We support our field staff's interpersonal needs so they are equipped to support the leaders from partner churches.

Please consider becoming a Bright Hope member by joining [Impact](#) with your gift of \$15/month or [Radiant](#) with a gift of \$39/month.

No matter the size or regularity of your giving, all gifts help some of the most vulnerable people around the world.

Give online at www.BrightHope.org/covid

Or mail to: Bright Hope 2060 Stonington Ave. Hoffman Estates, IL 60169

THANK YOU!

