



Ezekiel and his mother, Dembe, in Uganda. Photo by CRS staff

Supporting Vulnerable Children and Families Across Africa

All children deserve safe, nurturing families. We can make this vision a reality. Together, we will protect vulnerable children by strengthening families and increasing support and access to services.

Going Far

Poverty can impart lasting damage on children and families. Through **Go FAR: The Campaign for Catholic Relief Services**, we are addressing this problem at the root by supporting families and strengthening communities and social service systems. **Because we should, and because we can.**

The Need

Children living in extreme poverty often struggle with malnutrition and stunting, limited access to sanitation, preventable childhood diseases and dropping out of school. Many are vulnerable to violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and family separation, which destabilizes their physical and emotional health. Later in life, many suffer from the scars of trauma. These risks are even greater for children with disabilities and those living outside of family care.

Across Africa, such hurdles are preventing too many children from achieving their God-given potential. In Uganda, 56% of children live in families that lack basic services and necessities. In Ghana, 25% of children live in poverty, which heightens the risks of child marriage and unsafe work. In Ethiopia and Zambia, millions of children and families are living with HIV and AIDS-related illnesses and poverty. These stressors are pushing families to their limits.

Now, COVID-19 is further threatening recent gains in child health and well-being. Families have lost incomes and—with school and critical services shut down—there are fewer opportunities for children to receive support. Increasing socio-economic pressures across these countries have weakened traditional safety nets, such as support from neighbors and extended family. Left without options, many parents are forced to place their children into orphanages in order to secure them basic services.

“I’m so happy Ezekiel is growing up with me.”

—Dembe

The Opportunity

Children who grow up in safe, healthy and nurturing families have better outcomes in life—including improved cognitive, emotional and social development, better health and greater success in school. We are called to put our faith into action to care for the whole child, family and community.

Through CRS’ 10-year agency strategy, Vision 2030, we will support 1 million vulnerable children and their families. As a thought leader in health, education and microfinance, CRS can provide families and communities with the comprehensive support they need. By convening and mobilizing local partners and leveraging private support, we will achieve widespread, transformational change.



CRS engages local partners, including faith-based organizations, to ensure children and families receive the support they need to thrive. Photo by Dooshima Tsee/CRS

The Impact

Leading this global initiative, CRS will begin our work in Ethiopia, Ghana, Uganda and Zambia, where we will demonstrate impact that can benefit children everywhere. We will work at multiple levels—with children, families and communities—to address health and safety vulnerabilities and bolster nurturing environments.

Together, we will achieve the following:

With our partners, CRS will help strengthen vulnerable families to stay together and positively care for children. We will:

1. Deliver a positive parenting program to establish and sustain nurturing relationships between caregivers and their children.
2. Provide mental health and psychosocial support to children and caregivers.
3. Develop trainings and ongoing support to families caring for children with disabilities.
4. Strengthen families' economic capacity, including through financial education.

Working with communities, children and families, CRS and our partners will increase access to services and support. We will:

1. Improve referrals and access to safe, child friendly, gender-sensitive and inclusive health, education, social and other basic services for children and families.
2. Address gaps in services that vulnerable children and their families need.
3. Increase community awareness about both positive and harmful social practices and stigmas.
4. Strengthen community bonds and social safety nets through community groups.

CRS will help strengthen the capacity of local faith-based, civil society and government partners to better empower children, families and communities. We will:

1. Train and mentor partners on topics like positive parenting, economic strengthening, psychosocial support, referrals to integrated services or disability inclusive services.
2. Support community partners with income generating activities to bolster their capacity and sustainability to serve vulnerable children and families.
3. Enable local governments and organizations to coordinate and inform national policies.

A Family Forever

When Ezekiel's parents separated, his mother, Dembe, was terrified for her son.* How could she afford to take care of him? It nearly killed her to say goodbye, but she trusted an orphanage would give her child a better life.

One year later, CRS' social workers reached out to Dembe. By offering her a modest cash grant, we helped Dembe expand her small farm, jumpstart a broom-making business and make critical repairs to her home. In addition, Dembe, her new husband and Ezekiel all received counseling and reintegration support. Finally, after confirming their home environment was safe and secure, CRS helped Ezekiel return.

Today, Ezekiel is thriving, having just earned a scholarship for high school. Dembe now has confidence as a mother and is forever grateful she gets to see her son's face every morning, to hug him on his birthday, to talk and laugh and bond together. "I'm so happy Ezekiel is growing up with me," Dembe says. "I'm just so grateful that he knows me—that he knows who I am." **Names changed for privacy.*

The Legacy

As Pope Francis reminds us, families equip children to be a "beacon of goodness." Driven by the Gospel imperative, CRS will reach 60,000 children and 20,000 families across Ethiopia, Ghana, Uganda and Zambia. We will launch a transformational movement for the most vulnerable children and families.

Learn More
about our vision for
vulnerable children
crs.org/go-far-families



Catholic Relief Services | 228 West Lexington Street | Baltimore, MD 21201, USA | crs.org