International seminar

Global challenges and opportunities in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis

The 3 June was an important day for InteRed and our Teresian Association Local Partner Organisations with whom we work in international cooperation across four continents. They all participated in the webinar on “Global Challenges and Opportunities in the Aftermath of the Covid-19 Crisis”.

The objective was to generate a space in which to initiate a process of learning from each other and building together. As is often the case in global meetings, it also became an emotional time that exceeded expectations. We could feel the presence and voice of the people for whom we work, people who live in very difficult situations.

We had local testimonies from Bolivia, Mexico, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Peru, Argentina, India, Philippines, Democratic Republic of Congo and Spain. There were numerous interventions by the more than 70 people who participated. Our aim was the following:

- To deepen our understanding of the profound and serious impact of the pandemic in a wide range of contexts and on the most vulnerable populations
- to reaffirm our commitment to working in partnership on development cooperation
- to generate bonds of empathy and recognition between local partner organisations across four continents
- to enrich our global outlook and to project our next steps with hope.

Concerns

Despite the specific characteristics of each locality, the meeting revealed common concerns that are being addressed by the local organisations. All of these issues highlight the inequalities that the economic system has imposed on the vast majority of the population:

- **The greatest violation of human rights:** food, education, employment, access to water and sanitation and lives free of violence. These rights are being most affected in this crisis and all organisations must join forces and create alliances to cover these fundamental rights more concretely.

- **Gender-based violence:** this has been one of the main concerns and realities observed by the local partner organisations. Violence against women in this global context of lockdown has made it harder for women to denounce it. They are in fear of the risks of being isolated at home with their aggressor. Many local partner organisations have now integrated care and assistance responses for women who are victims or at risk of violence.

- **Domestic violence against children:** the local partner organisations reported on the experiences of children who suffer physical aggression, psychological pressure and sexual abuse within their families. This fact has forced organisations and schools to take measures
together with municipal institutions. They listen, care for and protect children, and work with parents to prevent this type of abuse.

- **School dropout**: hunger and the struggle to survive can drive many families to resort to making their children work in order to get food and this can lead to them dropping out of school. In order to guarantee schooling, the local partner organisations and InteRed see the need for direct assistance and support for families.

- **The impact of the virtual world on community**: the importance of community, of personal relationships and of needed assistance in the learning process cannot be replaced by technology. The participants went beyond the complexities of technology and its great potential and concentrated on the vital need to maintain aspects that are inherent to communities and to the programmes and projects in which they work.

- **The digital divide**: in many areas and communities, especially in rural areas, access to the Internet is almost non-existent and there are limitations on the use of mobile phones, so thousands of children have been without any kind of schooling or guidance for months. These situations pose a great challenge to the many educational projects that InteRed supports in 12 countries that are based on physical presence and assistance for these children. The digital divide with a gender focus has also been very much highlighted by the local partner organisations. For the teams themselves, this immersion in the virtual world has highlighted the need for training and the need to accelerate the digitalisation of the organisations, but they insist that physical attendance and personal contact must not be excluded.

- **Difficulties in funding**: whether from public or private sources, it is estimated that obtaining financial resources to carry out educational and development initiatives will become more complicated. This situation presents us with innovative ways and alliances to ensure that the work and impact on improving the lives of children, young people and women is not adversely affected.

- **The situation of migrants and refugees**: in India, Peru, Argentina, Guatemala, etc., the present lack of protection and the violation of rights of migrant and refugee populations is very worrying. Advocacy is required to encourage states to protect and safeguard these people. This response must go beyond the humanitarian assistance that local partner organisations can offer at this time.

- **The growth of authoritarianism**: in many countries the authoritarian position of governments has become more acute. Social organisations and movements are responding to the emergency but they have few options and lack coordinated political impact in this new context full of uncertainty. Collective efforts and advocacy to guarantee the rights of the entire population cannot be restricted.

- **The rural-urban divide**: conditions of poverty, lack of access to basic services such as health and education, difficulties in obtaining decent employment and livelihoods – all of this leaves people in rural areas in a drastic situation in which there is a lack of protection and there is hunger and abandonment. Serving these people will be a priority for InteRed.
- **Psycho-emotional support and care of the teams**: the people who are part of the local partner organisations’ teams are in the front line of the pandemic. This, added to their personal and family stress and worries, results in a high workload and has a major impact on their emotional, psychosocial and psychological well-being. That is why the organisations provide their teams with support services and psychological care. This allows them to take care of the most valuable resource in any organisation – its people.

**Opportunities**

These realities and challenges are, at the same time, opportunities that must be availed of together. What are these opportunities?

- **To enhance our assistance** is the key to overcoming this crisis and sustaining life. It is a commitment that InteRed has been working towards for almost a decade.
- **To reinforce our activities in rural areas**, locations where the challenges and needs are still very extensive.
- **To improve our networking** and learn from the exchange of experiences of partner organisations that work in very different contexts but have common objectives: to guarantee the right to education, to ensure that people live lives free of gender violence and to build critical citizenship.

The Covid-19 has revealed and exacerbated all the crises that an unjust capitalist system has been producing for decades. It obliges us more than ever to strengthen the bonds that unite us, to work in networks from wherever each one of us is located, and to foster a critical view of reality which will enrich us collectively. Everything should help us build and grow together.

**Evaluation**

Our online meeting received very positive feedback. The results of the evaluation indicate that the webinar fulfilled its fundamental objective which was to contribute to the internal reflection of each organisation at a time of great uncertainty.

All confirmed the relevance of the space we have created and the need to give continuity to this process of shared reflection. All the responses were favourable to the proposal to hold further webinars that will allow for more in-depth study of some of the topics addressed.

We will continue our reflection and together we will try to formulate ideas and activities. This will strengthen the international network that comprises all the TA entities working in the field of international cooperation, and we will continue to carry out our mission for global justice.