

## Working Together Towards a Higher Calling by Cherian Thomas

World NGO Day - February 27, 2022

In recent years, political leaders, governments and multi-lateral organisations have strongly affirmed positive contributions made by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in addressing severe human needs, especially in contexts adversely affected by COVID-19 or political unrest. Contributions from individuals and institutional donors seem to be on the uptrend, and there is a surge in humanitarian programming activities on the ground. However, the brutal truth lies in the fact that NGOs are increasingly having to operate in contexts that place greater constraints on our staff and operations than ever before.

Since 2014, February 27 has been observed as World NGO Day. It is a tribute to all non-governmental & not-for-profit organisations and employees, and it seeks to recognise the immeasurable contributions to human society, even in the most difficult circumstances. Today, as we continue to call for greater cooperation between NGOs and the private & public sectors in taking on some of the world's greatest humanitarian challenges, it is also timely to shed light on the increasing contextual limitations faced by NGOs, and consider how we could all work together towards this higher calling.

As a result of the pandemic, 58 million more people are expected to move below the poverty line in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa alone. Additionally, a report last year estimated that the global NGOs and charities market would shrink by 0.9% from a high of USD 255.71 billion in 2019 to USD 253.34 billion in 2020, mainly due to the lockdowns & restrictions imposed by various countries, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the severe global economic downturn. This is despite a projection that donor engagement is on the rise, and total donor numbers are forecast to reach 2.5 billion by 2030. While an estimated 10 million NGOs exist worldwide, the shrinking operational space and human capacity which we experience is less accounted for.

Rising levels of ethnic, religious, social and political polarisation across the globe have problematised the humanitarian crises which NGOs seek to address. Here, in the Asia Pacific, the most disaster-prone region, where we also have the highest number of refugees and more than half of the world's most vulnerable people, the challenges related to pandemic transmission in densely populated countries, the emergence of strong majoritarian influences and impact of military instability in some countries have led to a diminished role for NGOs, while humanitarian issues have exploded.

On World NGO Day, we need to reflect on the critical role NGOs play both now and in the future. Organisations should be given more opportunities to effectively develop and implement programmes and activities in key areas such as disaster relief, health & nutrition, education, gender equality, social inclusion, safeguarding, livelihoods & climate change, mitigation, shelter and protection for the world's most vulnerable children and communities. To do this, NGOs need to continue nurturing and maintaining strong, open, and reliable partnerships with government agencies. Simultaneously, there should be a constant effort to improve programme management and use resources efficiently and transparently.

At World Vision, our agenda is clear and unchanging – we stand by and serve the most vulnerable children and communities, even in the most challenging natural and human circumstances. With greater global awareness that we all have a part to play in championing

change, our hope remains that we will be able to overcome the shrinking space that faces us in our service to vulnerable children in Vietnam and across the world.

**Note:**

In Vietnam, over the past three decades and more, World Vision has worked hand-in-hand with the Vietnamese government, other NGOs, and communities to successfully implement many relief and long-term development programs in 18 cities and provinces. Besides, since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also extended our intervention outside of the operational areas through emergency support packages for people and frontline workers in severe outbreak regions, including Dien Bien Province, Bac Ninh Province, District 12 (Ho Chi Minh City), Thu Duc City (Ho Chi Minh City), District 4 (Ho Chi Minh City), Can Tho Province, and Dong Nai Province. Up to this moment, the total value of World Vision's COVID-19 emergency support activities in Vietnam has been nearly 70 billion VND (USD 3,066,140), with an estimation of more than 1,068,157 beneficiaries, of which 587,681 were vulnerable children.

In the Asia-Pacific region, World Vision has more than 7,300 employees from 18 countries, serving 10.3 million children, families and communities. Along with nearly 40,000 other World Vision employees worldwide, we are proud to partner with local authorities and people in our persistent efforts to improve the well-being of communities, especially the most vulnerable children.

**About the author:**



Cherian Thomas is the Regional Leader of South Asia and Pacific, World Vision International.

Cherian brings to World Vision extensive experience in banking and development finance, infrastructure development, policy advocacy, capacity building, programme support. He worked for over 29 years in corporate finance, project finance and banking for leading corporations, including IDFC Limited, Tata Industries Limited, ICICI Limited, SCICI Limited, and Citibank. Prior to his current role as Regional Leader for World Vision South Asia and the Pacific, Cherian was the CEO and National Director of World Vision India and led a team of around 1500 staff, serving 2.6 million children through 200 programmes and projects.