**Transcript: “The COVID-19 Crisis: Civil Society Responses in Mexico and Along the Border”**

Hosted by the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University  
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Zoom Webinar

**Katherine Marshall:** Welcome to the sixth webinar we have organized focusing on the COVID emergency and faith responses. I'm Katherine Marshall, at the Berkley Center at Georgetown University, in Washington, DC, and also the World Faiths Development Dialogue. I join our partners, Olivia Wilkinson, with the joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, and Dave Robinson, who is independent but has a long history with World Vision.

We launched, very early in March, a project to track and to learn about how faith communities all over the world were responding, particularly linked to development and humanitarian issues. The objectives are to learn and to ensure that lessons from earlier pandemics are in our minds and are reflected in our understandings and action.

This webinar is focused on Mexico and the U.S. border, closer to home than an event two weeks ago, which focused on Asia. We have with us three colleagues, remarkable each in their own way; their bios are on the Berkley Center website. The style is conversational, batting back and forth various questions on emerging issues and hopefully looking with some hope towards a better future. Jorge Vivanco is the president of Zukara and a longtime chair of the World Vision Mexico Board and Vision Fund Mexico. Benjamin Laniado is the secretary-general of CADENA, a humanitarian relief agency, based in Mexico City. And Dina Buchbinder Auron is a social entrepreneur in many senses of that word and she still despite wide experience qualifies as a youth leader. She founded Educación para Compartir (Education for Sharing) and is based in New York. The other two are based in Mexico City. We start with some initial questions, discuss among ourselves, and then encourage you to use the Q&A function to raise questions; we will get to as many as we can.

Let me start by asking Jorge to give us your sense of what is happening, first of all in Mexico but also along the border. It scares us that what was a dramatic crisis on which we all focused psychic
energy and attention, along the U.S. border, has almost vanished from the news. What do you think is happening? What are the trends? What are the big issues?

**Jorge Vivanco:** To understand how the COVID-19 outbreak, that we have suffered since March, affects us in Mexico, we have to see the whole picture. Mexico is a country affected by large and continuing forces. At least 300,000 to 400,000 people are moving at any time from Central America to Mexico, most of them trying to reach the U.S. to get a job. Beside these people seeking jobs, there are 400,000 to a million people (it varies a lot by year), who for a century have also been moving and looking to the U.S. for jobs but also the American dream. So Mexico has several hundred thousand people moving all the time, trying to reach the U.S.

When the COVID-19 outbreak began in March, the Mexican authorities announced actions to try to stop that migration from the southern border and along the northern border, this because of some agreements they had reached with the Trump administration. They have deployed around 5,000 people from the National Guard along the southern border and 15,000 on the northern border. This of course has curtailed migration to those destinations, and it has declined to at least to one third of the normal numbers. So although migrants are still coming into Mexico and many are still entering the U.S., the movement of people has been sharply reduced. This reduces the risk of the COVID-19 outbreak.

What is happening on the borders? There are two big stories, or branches, about what is happening. One is that more official channels are supporting people, through the official hospitals and other public entities. The other is what happens alongside that, through UNHCR, WHO, the NGOs, World Vision, and many other organizations, including many churches, that are supporting all these people, trying to supply all the goods and resources needed to avoid and treat the outbreak. What these NGOs are doing is an amazing effort. I talked recently with the people responsible in Tapachula, near the southern border, and in Tijuana, the most important border with the U.S. The numbers they gave me are amazing. They are operating 40 or 50 shelters along both borders. They have almost no cases of COVID and all that have been discovered are under control. The people have enough supplies.
So where is the tragedy? The tragedy is all the thousands of people who do not reach these shelters and that are somewhere, trying to survive, waiting to find ways to cross the border easily and reach the territory of the United States. Nobody knows the fate of these thousands of people because they are not in the shelters, and if they cross borders they don't have papers. Nobody knows the numbers and their welfare, but we could be talking about hundreds of thousands of people who are just hidden somewhere, waiting for the outbreak to decrease.

Thus we are fairly optimistic about COVID cases among the known communities and about the mobilization efforts, but we are concerned about all the other people, where we don't know where are they and their situation in regard to COVID.

**KM:** Is the support organized, or is it generally spontaneous?

**JV:** Fortunately, there are very good coordination mechanisms among all these organization, dating back four to five years. I would say UNHCR [ACNUR in Spanish] is playing a strong and positive role here in Mexico, along with WHO, World Vision, UNICEF, and many religious organizations. They have a board where they meet regularly, and, from the very start, they have tried to ensure that there is no duplication of action. When I was in World Vision working on such programs we realized that poor coordination was a real problem. As an example, World Vision had a program monitoring the weight of newborns. One day we realized that some newborns had been weighed and monitored by five different organizations, which we agreed was crazy. So we organized a mechanism, trying to identify where each organization was strong, and where tasks could be divided among us. We agreed to split the job. Of course this made us more efficient. When the COVID outbreak came, we already had a coordinating mechanism in place, both for the U.S. border and for the Guatemala border. They meet regularly now, of course very often, and they report on numbers of requests for help. They share resources and knowledge. They also share people. This has been working astonishingly well.

**KM:** Benjamin, what about your perspective? What are you seeing? What is the general situation? How are organizations that have a religious link working? How are they working separately or together?
Benjamin Laniado: Faith-based organizations have huge work to do and a very central place in this outbreak. This is linked to the fact that we have communities. I can speak first for myself. My organization is CADENA, which is the humanitarian arm of the many Jewish communities around the world. We can trigger a lot of help because we have the capability to work through a community. So my first point is that in every hazard, every disaster or crisis that we manage, I have seen personally that the faith-based organizations are very, very strong and have a very central place in the response. That's why we can mobilize and grow immediately if we use our network. The networks are very powerful. We can manage even when two countries are involved, thus with a cross border strategy. We can help each other a lot.

Let's take an example. We are dealing a lot with immigrants on the borders of Venezuela and Colombia. Our place there is to be a sort of mediator between the government, the immigration ministry, and the people. Because neither knows how to speak to the other, they fight each other all the time. We started working with them before the COVID crisis, so we have built trust. And trust is very important, because if people trust you, when you need something and you want to implement some strategy that involves politics and the agenda for the people who are suffering, an NGO had the capability to do that work. We have played important roles for some time. Now, we are working very hard to convince the communities that are on the border, and even in Bogota, that are not totally alone. With COVID, saying that they have nothing means nothing. They don't have an idea how to rearm themselves and how to rebuild their own lives. We are therefore working on a number of strategies, with several partnerships that bring in many other faith organizations. We are well placed to do that, because everyone brings to the table the best of what they can do. With that cooperation at the tables and working in very synergic ways, with strong leadership, we can reach a lot of people and have a real impact on them in changing the realities.

In Mexico, for example, everything that we've done, we have done with a lot of partnerships. We have always had to deal with the poverty which, as you know, is an important chronic problem in Mexico, as it is in much of the Third World. When you add another crisis and more hassles, with another element intermingled, like COVID, everything is more dramatic. But it is set
against this base, this basic situation that we have in Mexico, where something like half the country lives in poverty, and now they have nothing to eat. So our agendas and strategic approaches have had to shift a lot from the normal humanitarian way of doing things.

Normally, we don’t deal with poverty, because a humanitarian strictly works with crisis and disasters. We work to reduce people’s suffering, but we need a trigger to go ahead. But now the trigger is COVID and so the map, or we could say the scope that opens in front of our eyes is huge. It’s very big because we must deal with poverty. That’s the way we are working now. We have gone back to basics and are giving people safety, food, clean water, shelter, and psychosocial support. There is a large need for psychosocial work around the world. We are also involved in fighting against COVID directly in the hospitals. We are giving support in the form of proper equipment to the doctors and all the people that work there, who are really the heroes of this story, so they can do their jobs without being infected.

**KM:** You’ve mentioned networks and partnerships several times. Could you give an example of how one works, and how they are affected by the COVID crisis?

**BL:** I don’t mean donors. Donors are donors, and we have lots of alliances with donors. But an example of a partnership is with another NGO, called Alma. Alma is a very good NGO in Mexico, also from the Jewish community. They work a lot with health, especially with cancer. They have an extensive map, knowledge of the network of hospitals, something that we don’t have because we had not normally worked in that field. So we forged an alliance between Alma and CADENA and started working together. It was very successful. We have given more than 14,000 items of equipment for hospitals in Mexico. This achievement is important because the government is not able to do the job as it should. You can imagine in this situation that the doctors do not have the equipment they need to treat patients. We are dealing with that. We are providing food to the people who are outside the hospitals waiting for their families and relatives. Every day we provide thousands of hot meals. We are able to do this based on Alma’s help in providing the maps. That’s an example of a case where we have trust in each other and everybody puts in the best of the best that they can do, and the achievement is huge.
**KM:** Dina, you have a broad picture of civil society. How are you seeing civil society organizations responding, both in Mexico but also along the borders? There are several borders as has been highlighted here. How do religious communities integrate and enter into this situation now?

**Dina Buchbinder Auron:** Thank you so much for this invitation. I agree with Jorge and Benjamin on many points. I call this the pandemic of pandemics because, as Benny said, this COVID crisis is triggering and exacerbating so many other dire situations that we were already experiencing, like poverty, violence, and so many people who lag behind in critical ways.

We are so interconnected, and, really for the first time, we are fully aware of that reality. This is so evident and it is shaking us all. We are indeed, all of us, in the same storm. It’s important, of course, to say though, that in this storm we are on different boats or ships. And some don’t have ships, some don’t have boats, or their boats cannot navigate through the storm, and some don’t even know how to swim. So that means they have no resources and they're left to drown. This is put in stark evidence by the COVID crisis.

Looking from a broad perspective, I see three threads in the experience of NGOs and civil society organizations. First, those whose work focus is research can, roughly, continue doing what they did before. They can work from home, still have the research to do, and many have the funds to continue their research at least through the end of the year. A second category of organizations work in the field, like Education for Sharing. They have had to reimagine and rethink: how we can be of service, not being able to get out into the field? There are some who are privileged to have projects that continue, even though much field work is blocked. Third are less privileged organizations that have had to stop completely because they don’t have the funds to continue doing work on their core mission. We find that a vast number of not only businesses and companies but also nonprofit organizations are having to close their doors because they don’t have a way to survive. Their focus right now, of course, is on what are absolutely the most urgent matters to ensure people’s survival. This is an important reality.
It's fascinating to look at how the COVID crisis is a very cultural phenomenon. We give different value systems and different meanings to various facets of the challenges in different countries and even in different religiously based organizations. For example, in some cultures: maybe Italy or Mexico vis-à-vis Japan, China, or Korea, the approaches have been starkly different, with very different results in terms of controlling the spread of the virus.

Going back to Benny's point on the Jewish community in Mexico and in the world, it offers one example among so many of how decisions that affect entire communities for the better are possible when you are coordinated. For instance, from one day to the next, literally all schools, all community centers, all synagogues, and every single space where people met in the Jewish community were closed, just like that. And they also were able to reinforce the community with all sorts of different activities online: concerts, events, and conferences, so that they could nourish the lack of physical contact at home.

Most organizations, I think, have had to reinvent themselves very quickly, more quickly than they could ever have imagined. This is one of the positive aspects of this crisis: crisis makes us change. By definition, opportunity lies in crisis. They really push us to the limit, to go beyond, to move forward, and to challenge the status quo. There is such a huge array of efforts on offer out there for people to do at home.

Looking to the aftermath of the COVID, there will be much work that has to do with mental health. We need in the current moment to do what we can to protect the mental health of families that were already stressed, but now are hyper-stressed beyond that normal level. Many organizations are trying to come up with ways to work digitally. That is our personal case, in Education for Sharing.

KM: I'm interested in how your organization, which focused so much on children, has adapted. How, more broadly, do you see the effects of the crisis on children?

DB: We worry. What keep us from sleeping at night is that we know firsthand, and that the statistics don't lie, about the children that lived with violence and abuse at home before the
COVID crisis. Now, of course, this is one of the aspects that is most exacerbated, because parents are more stressed out. They don't know what to expect. Uncertainty is at its peak. So what we are focusing on is how to better serve families now that they are at home and to provide resources that are practical, fun, meaningful, healthy, and can provide an atmosphere, an environment at home that is most propitious and better geared towards providing a sense of resilience for the time when we come back together. Most parents have to work all day, every day, and need to survive. We are not used to spending so much time with our children, and often we don't know what to do with our children. We have to cope with working from home, etc. This is a very broad reality and we need to acknowledge it. We need to be nimble in providing what parents can use today, so that they can be themselves and survive. It's like the advice on the airplane: to put on the mask yourself first, so you can save your children. It's the same in the crisis. You have to be in a minimal state of mental health so that you can provide for your children, your family, and your surroundings.

So we have crafted a whole lot of stay-at-home activities for the time when all have to stay at home. Many organizations have made similar efforts to create suitable activities including tutorials, experiments, and games for families at home.

KM: Jorge, you've also focused a lot on children over many years. What kind of adaptations and what kind of challenges are you seeing specifically for young people?

JV: As you know, many of the NGOs that are involved in the COVID response are focused on children. Our main activity, in World Vision, over the last few years has been advocacy activities. Protection of children is the very first priority for us. During this outbreak, we have had to change, of course. Our first focus now is to keep families together. The second is health, including mental health. And third is how to keep children active, including education but also recreation activities. Fourth would be all the other topics.

We have had to change the order of activities that we were used to. In the past, World Vision worked with very well-trained people who can handle groups of children and keep them moving throughout all day. We adapt. One amazing example was during the 2017 earthquake. We
visited a program near the epicenter and were amazed at the job they were doing. For instance, they were taking time to teach the children music, adapting what they were supposed to be learning at school with games and physical activity. All this is an important part of keeping them healthy. The immunity system needs to be in touch with the earth, the air, and water so that it can be reinforced and heal. There are important achievements like these not only of World Vision but all the organizations that are working with children.

**KM:** Benjamin, among all the groups, with everyone challenged and mind-numbing and frightening numbers, are there specific groups and communities that you're focusing on and that you worry most about? Older people and indigenous communities are some of the logical ones that we know about.

**BL:** Right at the beginning of the COVID crisis, we started with a mapping, to map out the most needy people. We always focus on the most needy people, let’s say in a hazard, in an earthquake, in a civil war. In our mapping of the neediest people, for us first of all were old people. So right away we began a beautiful program for companionship with a volunteer from CADENA to an older person who does not have family or anybody that can take care of them. The companion engages him or her every day, to make sure that he or she is okay, and also to prevent depression, sickness, and death. This wonderful program is running very well. It was so successful that the government took up the program, and we are now launching it at a national level. So it’s an excellent one.

We then started moving to the most needy people, those facing multiple hazards. This is a multi-hazard problem, as we are facing multiple vulnerabilities. Let's say poverty first, and then people have no jobs. And now we have hurricanes and a lot of floods everywhere in Mexico. So Mexico is a pretty interesting place to solve problems, because we have so many problems that are systemic: there are always systemic risks. The most vulnerable people now are facing extreme poverty, no work, and then natural risks. We are now launching a lot of alerts. We are first responders, and thus we go to the field.
As a parenthesis, normally, when you are doing humanitarian work, you yourself work from a good position with good status and good health. But now everybody is in the same boat; everybody’s in the same channel, everybody’s vulnerable now. So to work now and to go to the field and to help people is a truly heroic action. We humanitarians, in my view, have to do that. Just as the doctors do their jobs in the hospitals, humanitarians need to work in the field in dangerous situations. So we just go out, all over the country. That means in Chiapas, on the borders, in the Zacatecas, in Tabasco, in the southeast. It's amazing how big the needs are there.

We now, for example, are working in a partnership with World Vision, Save the Children, and CADENA to raise an alert in Start Network in London. We are part of the Start Network. They have a start fund. You can launch and raise an alert, and they can raise funds, project by project. This is the case now, for all the peninsula of the southwest and the southeast, like Yucatan. Everywhere is now facing much suffering, because of the hurricanes, besides the COVID situation. So we face a multi-systemic problem.

Another very large group in need are families. We are facing the challenge of helping families all over Mexico with a call center project. It’s a very charismatic one because you can call or you can join by a bot in WhatsApp. We have hundreds of professional volunteers that are receiving those calls. Thus we can bring psychosocial support to prevent violence, to prevent depression, even things that go deeper, more things that can go out of control. We have spiritual leaders from all the religions, a beautiful practice. So if you are a Christian or Jewish or Muslim or Buddhist or atheist, you can call and you will have support from a spiritual perspective, and also a medical orientation. Medical orientation is very important because people in Mexico don't know when to go to the hospital, so people die in their houses because they don't know when to make the decision to go to the hospital. This is a tool that we are managing, and we are saving a lot of lives, every single minute.

I see the situation as a war. We are in a war with COVID, and this war has a lot of different risks, over 360 degrees. So we are facing each one and doing our best to face and to help and to reduce the suffering of the people in a lot of ways.
KM: I would like to start turning to some of the questions that have come in. I encourage listeners to go to that Q&A function at the bottom and raise your questions.

Several people are asking for details about the programs that you've mentioned. We will collect those as well as information about the various NGO boards, the elderly program that Benjamin mentioned., etc. I agree there's a lot of gold in what you're saying, a lot of information that's not generally available and that people are very interested in.

Alvaro Abacete asks a specific question on access to water in the COVID situation, where it is even more needed to prevent infection. Are there any specific measures or programs? We can see if any of you have anything to add there, Benjamin?

BL: We are distributing water filters in those places that I already mentioned. When you have a hazard like a meteorological hazard, all the water is contaminated. They don't have money to buy bottles of water, and they start drinking from everywhere. The sickness rates get higher and higher, not because of COVID, but because of dirty water. This is a problem we have faced for many years. So in every situation, to respond, we bring the filters and install in each house a bucket with a filter. Each filter can provide 800 liters per day, only using gravity. You take the dirty water, put it in the bucket, and clean the water so it's good for drinking, for washing hands, everything that we need for hygiene and health. This is very important. We are distributing thousands of these filters.

KM: Jorge, do you have examples?

JV: In terms of material support, we focus on two items. The first is to supply to all people in the shelters sanitary kits. We are also supplying pantries, as we want to be sure they have food and they have everything they need to be protected. There are over 30 to 40 shelters that World Vision contributes to.

KM: Dina, any specific comment on sanitary, water issues?
**DB:** On sanitation, we are not providing toolkits, thus the physical aspect of it. But I think it’s as necessary sometimes to realize that you may have the technology, but you don’t necessarily then have the know-how or the emotional capacity to deal with something. Benny made a comment about the call centers, which is I think a fantastic initiative. Sometimes something very hands-on can be very helpful, something that parents can actually feel that they don’t have to know anything just to do it. That can be a huge relief. Anything that complements the possibility for us to grow stronger and to come back stronger from this crisis and to prepare for the ones that are coming is of great value, because this is just a taste of what we have to be prepared for in the world.

**KM:** That’s a sober note, but perhaps we can turn to some more positive insights that all of you have highlighted and mentioned. Obviously, the extraordinary crisis that we’re facing touches everywhere, everyone, and all sectors, and it challenges every institution. Dina: yes, we have all these gaps, but you’ve also highlighted some of the positive sides, particularly the sort of enforced creativity, the need to come up with solutions to the impossible. If you are thinking and looking in that vein, what might you point to as avenues for the future?

**DB:** There is a phrase that I often think about during this COVID crisis: that “the world is pregnant with opportunity.” It’s about the possibility of reinventing the “system of systems.” This crisis is inviting us, pushing us, to really rethink, reimagine, reprioritize what it is that we truly care about as humans on planet Earth. Why do we care about others? We have always heard the notion that we are interconnected, and what happens there has an effect here. But now it is more evident than ever before; it’s a lived experience for all of us everywhere that suffering somewhere in China definitely affects you on the other side of the world, and vice versa. This is a very powerful message that we are learning collectively as a community of communities. Some of the most entrenched issues that we have been fighting against throughout the history of humankind, we now can take a refreshed look and say, this is our opportunity not just to survive this but to go really deep and take that deep dive and reset it, if you will. So this is one opportunity that we have with this new baby of the world, the very tangible notion of how interconnected we are and that we, as humans, do care about others and need to continue nourishing this aspect of caring.
An aspect of hope is that we have learned so much in such a very short time. We never imagined that we could do things that we are doing anywhere, from using technology to reaching populations that we never reached before. We spend more time with our families; before we had not discovered what it’s like to be together on a daily basis like this and to be able to actually get organized and coordinated and bring about a good, positive environment. As to climate change, we have realized in a short time that huge gaps can be met in positive ways.

So it’s an invitation to be grateful. But more than just being grateful, we have the responsibility to be grateful. And with that responsibility and with the notion of finding ourselves being grateful, we ask ourselves how we can do more for the people around us and those that are not necessarily around us but that are here.

**KM:** Wonderful! Benjamin, I have huge admiration for people who work in a humanitarian field. It’s sometimes such soul-challenging work to deal with every disaster. We now confront the disaster of all disasters, from some perspectives. What is your to-do list for the leaders of the world? What needs to happen? Or to communities? How are you looking ahead?

**BL:** I’m looking ahead in a very positive way, but I know that the process that we will have to go through will be hard. It’s not something that we can just look at simply with a smiley and happy face. Many people are suffering a lot. I know well that very strong leadership is needed. And you always have to take care about the welfare of the central, overall agenda. The challenge is how to deal with the major agenda and to move forward, looking to the welfare of the people and, at the same time, to keep in mind and look after the details, because that is the only way to ensure through processes that the most needy people do not suffer so severely. This will be a challenge, and that’s why we need to work together.

My message to the governments and the leaders of the world is that we have to work together and to understand that we are connected, whether we want to be or not, even if we would rather not. We are tightly interconnected, and that’s the only way we can survive. The same things that put everybody in risk are those that we can also take strength from, and take to another level so
that we respond together and are truly co-responsible. Then we can respond to these crises like a family.

We in the faith NGOs, based in faith ideas, believe at a basic level, with our faith in religious ideas, in the human family. We believe in the common well-being. We truly believe in that. This is a time when we have to set aside the ideas and thoughts that keep us apart. This is the time when we need to practice all the thoughts, all the ideologies, all the philosophies, all the books that we've read and absorbed for a thousand years. This crisis forces us to take the opportunity to practice that wisdom and those teachings. Not just to say that we are a family, but to act and to practice as if we are truly one family.

So how do we start? Obviously, we start with the littlest, the smallest circle, which is myself, and then my family, and then my community, and then my country, and then my continent, and then my world. In that global or universal perspective, we can deal with a lot of things, because people have to be responsible and to deal with each person as I deal with myself. And then it can grow and grow and grow, sharing everything that I can share. This is a very beautiful practice that humanitarian faith organizations have at their core.

This is my message: that we need to be resilient. And to be resilient, we have to be adaptable. Adaptable is one of the values belonging to *Homo sapiens* that took our species up to the summit of a chain, the chain life in the world. The fact that over thousands of years we have adapted ourselves to warm temperatures, to cold temperatures, shows that we are good at adaptation. So let's do it. Let's adapt ourselves with the things that we can do. We also need to put a lot of resilience in our agenda. How do we recover from what is happening in a systematic way? That means not only for health. We need to have on one hand health and thus the value of life, to be safe and not to be contaminated by the virus. But we also need to think about well-being. We can't forget about well-being, because that is our nature, always to have welfare in mind. To tell everybody simply to stay at home for a year and a half is not the solution. We have to deal with the problems and the challenge. I don't have the specific formula for that, but I know that we have to come up with a formula to assure both well-being and health, and to ensure that everybody has access to that formula.
KM: Jorge, what’s your sense of what we need to do and how we can move forward?

JV: Humankind is indeed living through an unforgettable season. First, we are deeply sorry about the suffering that the many are experiencing. But we also must take advantage of the experience. I believe that humankind has to reset their hard disk. We have to come to an analysis of the basics and to reconsider the potential of collaboration and the potential of teamwork. I know that these two subjects are used constantly, everywhere: teamwork and collaboration. But believe me, we have seen results that show the enormous potential that humankind has if we really work together.

Let me give you an example of something I learned about just a few months ago, and in highlighting it I want to underline that the problem is not necessarily always money.

I visit a school on the Mexican border with the U.S., in Tijuana, a school with probably 1,000 students and very low levels of educational achievement—let’s say on a scale of one to 10, they were about five. They were concerned. They collaborated with some schools that World Vision was working with in El Salvador. We learned that in El Salvador there was an experiment in a group of schools. In each group of 50 students, they took the five with the highest marks and the five with the lowest and assigned the first group to work with the second. They taught the first group of five mentors how to handle things, and then to meet with a student from the lowest group every day for one hour before the end of the school day. They met in a classroom that kept them isolated. Then each one of the mentors helped the students to understand what they had not understood during the day. Just like that: simple, no money needed. And after six months the average scores of the schools increased by 25 percent, with no money invested, just collaboration.

We have the resources right in front of our eyes. But we need to learn from these experiences to work together, to collaborate. The joint efforts of groups of faith-inspired organization with UNHCR, WHO, UNICEF, and others have achieved astonishing results, just with
collaboration. We need to do that. We need to reset, and we need to come back to basics to achieve what we can and must do.

The world needs now to focus on core values. We all have to review our own values, in our homes, in our jobs, in our ministries. If we don’t do it now, we will never do it.

**KM:** That’s for another conversation, to find out how we’re going to do that! We are now five minutes from the end, and I want to give each of you the chance for one last quick comment before we close. Let’s start with Dina.

**DB:** One thing I would very much ask from leaders in governments, in the different administrations, is that they truly take into account and take a closer look, to understand the dynamics of what people actually go through. Then they could take into consideration the needs of people and understand better why they comply or not with public policies that the leaders put forth. Why are people not staying at home, for example? To understand why they do not stay at home in Mexico, for instance, we have half of the population working in the informal sector, and if they don’t go out, if they stay at home, they will not die of COVID, but they will die of hunger. They live by the day. So it’s important when they launch huge systemic policies that the governments, which are struggling to find the right balance between the health and economic aspects, need to realize that it’s really important for sound policies—that they come from a place where you are real in touch with people’s needs and what people are actually going through. That’s one point.

Following on Benny’s comment that we must not look at this as a smiley or a happy face, I understand what you are saying and I am with you there, truly with a broken heart for all that people are suffering. But I am very hopeful that we will come out stronger from these crises. I want to share a quote that I love from Desmond Tutu. He says, “Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.”

**KM:** Benjamin, any last word?
**BL:** Just to say to the people that are listening to this wonderful webinar, I think that leadership is the key. We need to make informed decisions, and there are different definitions of leadership. But for me, the real leader is the one who can make things happen. So the commitment and the passion that we put now into this cause, understanding how we fight for the cause of well-being of others, is the best way to leadership. It is the best way to give to our lives transcendence and resonance. This for me is leadership. So we need leaders. We need to think out of the box and we need to be creative, to bring to this reality different solutions, to reinvent, to reset in many ways our ways of doing things. The commitment is very important, because we will not be able to do it in a short term. This crisis will be with us for a long time. So the commitment to be a leader and to change realities has to be really strong and with a strong commitment to change realities. So that's my message.

**KM:** Jorge, you gave us some very strong messages on collaboration, teamwork, and networks in a very real way. Any one last, second last word?

**JV:** If we don't change today, we will never change as mankind. If we don't do it under this situation, when will we do it? I don't see a way.

**KM:** So this is the chance.

Unfortunately, we've come to the end of the hour. Let me thank the three of you for wonderfully informative and inspirational as well as sober analyses of the situation. It was really a quite remarkable set of very different perspectives but with common threads between them.

Several people have asked for details. Your bios are on the website, but we also can provide a bit more information about the organizations and specific programs that were mentioned. My colleagues can get details so that we can make them available to anyone who listened. The recording of this discussion will be on the Berkley Center website soon. I commit myself to looking through the transcript, because there are a lot of ideas here that I, at least, want to reflect on and build upon.
We will have our next webinar in about two weeks, on July 8, focused on issues of hunger and agriculture. We welcome your ideas on other issues and topics we should be looking at. As you've pointed out, this crisis covers many different dimensions and there's much to learn, from mistakes, but also from visions and examples of practical hope. We look forward to working with you and again thank you so much.

For more information on this event, see the Berkley Center website:

For more information on the Religious Responses to COVID-19 project, see:
https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/subprojects/religious-responses-to-covid-19