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## Editor's note

Children are the future pillars of society. Although this statement may sound cliché, this has been the goal of our work. And children are indeed the foundation of all societal progress. By offering children an opportunity to thrive, we enable the emergence of future leaders of good character who are after the heart of our Lord and fulfil His will.

In this issue of SHARE, 'Focus' brings us a retrospective glimpse of CEDAR's recently concluded quality education programme and how it transformed the lives of many impoverished children. While 'Blessing by Offering' has discussed our children's ministry programme in breadth and depth, 'Back to the Bible' has inspired us to rethink how our Lord has envisioned and positioned the vulnerable in our entire community. Finally, 'Learn a Little More' highlighted the significance of 'quality education' in the big picture of international developments as Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the 17 sustainable goals set out by the United Nations. We hope that this new perspective not only helps you to learn a little more but also helps a little more.

## FOCUS

### Quality Education Transforms Lives

*Written by Clara Chiu (Head of Partnership Development)*

'Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.' (Proverbs 22:6) This bible verse is probably very familiar to many of you. As Christians, when we hear this verse, we think of the Bible's teaching that parents shall discipline their children according to the will of the Lord so that their children can walk in the truth of the Lord throughout their lives.

Unfortunately, many children in this world are left behind by their parents, let alone the privilege of being brought up with the utmost care and taught about the truth of God. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that in 2022, 105 of every 100,000 children were separated from their parents and lived in children's institutions.

Furthermore, children living with their financially burdened families face substantial challenges in accessing educational opportunities. If we look at the countries where CEDAR have set up educational programmes for children—India and Bangladesh, a sizeable proportion of children who lived with

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families suffered from poverty. According to the data provided by UNICEF in 2020, 27.4% of children in India and 26.7% of children lived in families with income below the national poverty line.

These distressing conditions meant that the responsibility to care for and educate children could no longer be rest solely on the shoulders of parents and their original families. Therefore, many charities have sought public support to help impoverished children. The most typical form of public participation is through donations of 'one-to-one' student aid or child sponsorship. The popularity of this model among poverty alleviation agencies could be explained by its strength in providing long-lasting and stable support to the sponsored children with a strong bond and monthly donations.

However, with years of experience and dedication in development work, CEDAR believes that improving the overall condition of the community is more conducive and sustainable to the development of children. Therefore, as we continue to enhance our children's ministry strategy, we deliberately reduced child sponsorship programmes and replaced them with programmes that assist the internal development of communities and subsequently enable them to support the holistic growth of their impoverished children, which includes: providing quality education, protecting of children's rights, promoting children's health and cultivating social responsibilities, which brings a more profound and long-lasting transformation to their lives.

While 'one-to-one' child sponsorships are no longer CEDAR's approach to help impoverished children, the effectiveness of this type of children's ministry work cannot be negated. In this issue of SHARE, let us review this student aid sponsorship programme, which concluded at the end of June this year and witness God's grace throughout the years.

## The Transformation of India's Impoverished Children

In its early years, CEDAR had funded an Indian partner called 'Christian Missions Charitable Trust' (CMCT) through student aid. We supported their children's ministry since 1995, a cooperation lasting nearly 30 years. CMCT was founded by a New Zealand missionary who responded to the Lord's call in 1964 and came to the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu to serve, which marked the beginning of CMCT's ministries.



Sponsored Children in the Early Stages of the Programme

India is a country with a large population. Yet, employment opportunities are in significant shortage compared to its population. According to the Economic Times, India's national unemployment rate rose to 8.11% in April 2023 from 7.8% in March, which was the highest since December last year. The urban unemployment rate also escalated from

8.51% to 9.81% within the same period, while the unemployment rate in rural areas dropped slightly from 7.47% in March to 7.34% in April.

Our partner reported mass unemployment's extensive and profound impact on family ties and relations. The frustration and desperation of unemployment led many fathers to alcohol addiction and neglect their families, where they use the income earned by other family members to buy alcohol and drugs. With increasing economic pressure, many families borrowed money from their neighbours to make ends meet, let alone send their children to school. Consequently, children become major victims of mass unemployment, who lose their educational opportunities and become child labourers or marginalised teenagers.

Moreover, poverty led many impoverished families to live in simple, crude houses built without government permission, sanitary facilities and water supply. The areas where these impoverished families live are called slums. For children living in slums, 'survival' is paramount, and reading and literacy is a dispensable 'luxury'.

Therefore, CEDAR partnered with CMCT to respond to the needs of impoverished children and their families in India. By paying school fees for children and providing school essentials, such as school bags, school uniforms, shoes and books, as well as toiletries, underwear and nutritional drinks and working with CMCT-affiliated hospitals to provide annual physical examinations and health support, we hoped to care for children's educational and health needs comprehensively. Further, we organised monthly activity days and summer faith exploration gatherings to provide opportunities for children to reflect on their lives, strengthen their social skills, and promote whole-person development.



COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis: Partner Provided Supplies to Families in Need

## A Shimmering Path of Hope in the Dark

Abraham lost his mother when he was 10, and his father left him after remarrying. Since then, Abraham lived with his grandmother in a crude thatched hut. His grandmother worked as a domestic helper and earned barely sufficient income to meet the family's expenses. She was worried about her grandson's tuition fees. Hereafter, Abraham's grandmother heard that a school under CEDAR's partner could provide educational subsidies for children in need, so she went for help. After sending a social worker to learn about Abraham's situation, our partner referred him to a

student assistance programme funded by CEDAR. After receiving the financial aid, Abraham made new friends at school, expanded his social circle, and gradually became more comfortable around others rather than relying on his grandmother. In addition, the support has eased his grandmother's burden, and she can finally breathe a sigh of relief and live an easier life.



**Abraham lived with his grandmother after his father remarried and left home. With the support of CEDAR's partner, he showed a smile full of confidence and joy.**

Abraham has been studying hard and is currently studying for a bachelor's degree. This was unimaginable for his family, but his dream came true under CEDAR's student aid programme.

In three years, Abraham will graduate and enter the workforce, where he will be able to take care of his grandmother. CEDAR's partner described that CEDAR and CEDAR's supporters have become a beacon of hope for these children and families, shining the light of hope into their dark lives and enabling them to see the path of hope.

CEDAR's partner's loving actions demonstrates God's mercy and grace. In addition to assisting students, our partner also provided food and daily necessities to impoverished families, gave birthday gifts to assisted students, and organised Bible classes for children so that they can learn the words of the Lord. These actions conveyed the love of God to them and profoundly changed these families. Some families joined the local church after knowing faith.

## It is Time for Graduation

CMCT provides financial support to school-aged children until they graduate from college or complete vocational prerequisite courses. In 2021-2022, 80% of the 204 students sponsored by CEDAR found employment after graduation, and in 2022-2023, 90% of the 124 students sponsored by CEDAR found work, with the other 10% taking career training courses. The number of recipients decreased in 2022-2023, as it is time for this 28-year project to 'graduate'. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, CEDAR hopes to allocate resources to benefit the entire community so that children receive help in a comprehensively transformed community. Therefore, we started discussing with our partner

two years ago and developed a two-year exit plan (from July 2021 to June 2023) to equip our partner and sponsored children. From this discussion, we collectively decided to reduce the number of recipients gradually in the final stage of the project, which ensures that our partner had sufficient time to search for local resources, as well as the application of corresponding measures for primary, secondary and college students according to the exit plan to continue their educational journey.



**Pravendran's father drank excessively and neglected family responsibilities. With the support of our student aid programme, he graduated and became a professional footballer. He also participated in church gatherings with his mother under the guidance of CEDAR's partner. Although his family still faces financial difficulties, he volunteers to teach children in the student aid programme to play football to repay the loving actions of CEDAR's partner.**

While CEDAR has withdrawn from the student aid project with CMCT, we are both grateful that we have transformed the lives of many impoverished children through the decades. They can thrive and become a channel for blessing the next generation. We cherish our many years of working together. May our Lord continue to protect our partner and bless their ministries so that they glorify God and benefit His people.

CEDAR will continue to carry out more community-based projects to care for the children in need. We sincerely ask you to keep us in your prayers and watch over us. May the Lord give us wisdom, ability and resources to help more children and their families and let more people experience the blessings and benefits of knowing God.

## Sustainable Development Goals: Quality Education

Written by Samuel Ip (Intern)

The notion that our planet is in a state of decline is no longer a foreign concept. As we witness the tangible effects of climate change, environmental degradation, and social inequalities, this idea has transcended the realm of abstract concern. The urgency of addressing the sustainability of our society has become an undeniable reality, compelling us to explore proactive solutions on both global and individual scales. In response, the United Nations has introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a transformative agenda that aims to reshape the global landscape by 2030. As a guide for nations and stakeholders, these goals aim to integrate sustainable development into countries' policies. The anticipated outcomes of such changes should primarily manifest in society's economic, social, and environmental spheres. Under these three pivotal aspects, there are 17 goals.

Quality education (SDG 4) emerges as a pivotal pillar within the array of multifaceted challenges that the SDGs are designed to address. This pillar stands as a linchpin in our journey toward sustainability due to its intersection with multiple other SDGs. By nurturing an environment of inclusive and quality education for all, we equip individuals to break free from intergenerational poverty (Contributes to SDG1), bridge gender disparities (Contributes to SDG5), and foster environmental awareness and sustainable practices (Contributes to SDG 13).

There is some progress to highlight regarding SDG 4. i) The global primary school completion rate reached 84% in 2018, up from 70% in 2000 and is expected to reach 89% by 2030 under current trends. ii) The global adult literacy rate (aged 15 years and older) was 86% in 2018, while the youth literacy rate (aged 15 to 24 years) was 92%.



While the statistics on primary school completion and literacy rates are promising, it's crucial to acknowledge that disparities persist across regions. Therefore, ensuring equitable access to education and addressing factors that

discourage participation remain pivotal objectives. Beyond the corridors of policy and international collaboration lies the immense potential of individual action.

## How Could We Be Part of Sustainable Development?

One may inquire about their role in this seemingly ambitious and substantial cause. One such action is supporting education initiatives; you can search and donate to organisations that improve access to education for the marginalised and the disadvantaged. Also, offer your time and skills to volunteer in your church or NGOs to help students struggling academically.

Education is not limited to formal schooling. Promote lifelong learning opportunities by engaging in continuous learning yourself and encouraging others to do the same. This also contributes to the progress of SDG 4.

In essence, the canvas of sustainable development is not confined to the actions of governments and international organisations alone. It is a canvas onto which every individual can paint their mark, creating a masterpiece of positive change. With each empowered choice, every deliberate action, and the collective efforts of a global community, we inch closer to the harmonious future envisioned by the Sustainable Development Goals—a future that belongs to us all.

## 2023/2024 Operating Statements

In the period of Jul 2023 - Aug 2023

Income	HK\$	1,905,152
Donations		1,651,139
Grants		-
Appeal for Relief		167,653
Other Income		86,360

Expenditure	HK\$	3,404,729
Development Projects - Asia		1,773,155
- Middle East		-
- China & HK		531,982
- Africa		118,734
Disaster Relief & Rehabilitation Projects		141,023
Partnership Development		571,863
Administration		267,972

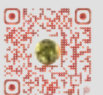
**Account profit and loss / (Deficit) HK\$ (1,499,577)**

Note: CEDAR's fiscal year is from July 1st to June 30th of the following year. The total budgeted expenditure for the fiscal year 2023 to 2024 is HK\$21,958,000. Please pray for and support CEDAR and its partners in their ministry.

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### The Mind of Sharing

*Written by Dr. Kevin CHENG Shun Kai (Former professor of Theology and Ethics at China Graduate School of Theology)*

'If you enter your neighbour's vineyard, you may eat all the grapes you want, but do not put any in your basket. 25 If you enter your neighbour's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to their standing grain.' (Deuteronomy 23:24-25)

'If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you.' (Leviticus 25: 35)

Many regulations related to harvest in the Old Testament were unprecedented in the ancient history of the Near East: During harvest, the Israelites were allowed to enter their neighbour's vineyards or crops, eat as much as they wanted, and meet their subsistence needs right away. They can enjoy it as much as they like, with the mere condition being they can only pick them with their hands rather than relying on tools, let alone take them away. This implied that the harvest could not be taken away and eaten for one's selfish desires, which subsequently safeguarded the interests of the farmland owner and prevented the abuse of such a unique privilege.

In the past, the land was given by the Lord to the Israelites to make a living. And today, the Lord gives us different skills and professions to make a living. In a modern society where individual rights are championed over collective interest, such harvest regulation confronted the conventional mindset of protecting one's property and rights: It allows outsiders to enter the 'private land' to feast during harvest when it is of utmost importance to forbid outsiders from breaching into the manor. This showed how much God cares about the needs of the poor and vulnerable. But how does this relate to us?

A regulation that is even more relevant to sharing is

demonstrated by Leviticus 25:35, which commands that one shall take any of their fellow Israelites who fall into financial distress into one's home to live with him and help him so that he does not end up on the streets. In this case, the other person will see all matters at home, big and small. Such a mindset of helping fellows in financial distress is also manifested in Chapter 11 of 'The Scholars': Friends are obliged to share wealth, so why bother with it.' This verse goes a step further and commands Israelites to take another person home and live with them.

The above verses demonstrated how the contemporaries of Ancient Israel regarded the matter of the 'survival and living' of a person or a family as an integral aspect of social relations and shared between a community. Every Israelite is a member of a covenant community, and this entire community formed a network where individuals cared for, protected and helped each other. The extent to which the Lord had commanded us to care for the disadvantaged is never unilateral, as he taught us that the entire community should consider their needs in multifaceted ways.

Let us think together:

Is it feasible to take a poor brother or sister home to live with them and help them in Hong Kong? Will that be asking for trouble? Supporting an elderly with difficulty walking can also lead to trouble in the Mainland, where you must be dexterous and kind and prepare for self-protection. So, how should we transform and implement these teachings so that people in need can receive real help?

And here I invite every one of you to take action:

A friend introduced you to a new immigrant family in a subdivided house. Their family of four lives in an 80-foot unit without windows, and they barely make a living. The father only works part-time, and his income is unstable. The two-year-old and four-year-old children have become ill one after another, and the father was infected with COVID again, which makes it a hard time for the family and the mother very worried. Please try to explore resources and methods that can help them.





Children of Ethnic Minorities on the Thailand-Myanmar Border

## Blessings by Offering

### Children Ministry: Beyond Food and Education

*Written by Rebecca Lee (Programme Consultant)*

When we speak of 'children's ministry', the provision of food and education have been typically and extensively identified as the primary needs of impoverished children. However, after years of implementing our programmes, CEDAR and its partners have realised that providing food and education alone is necessary yet insufficient for children's growth and, subsequently, their ability to make a living in the future. While many countries are now providing primary education for school-age children, the need for 'children's ministry' remained crucial: institutional deficiencies that are deeply entrenched in social structures meant that children still face immense challenges despite having better education and a stable food supply.

For instance, the lack of educational support posed substantial challenges for the children of ethnic minorities. Growing up in a community that only speaks their mother tongue, many children of ethnic minority backgrounds are often not exposed to the official language until they attend school. The experience of a language barrier at school meant that they struggled to understand basic instructions from teachers, which caused a significant disadvantage to their learning progress and eventually disincentivised them to attend school. Such a disadvantage with learning was exacerbated by their family's financial burden, where dropping out of school to earn wages and support one's family. Yet how do teenagers who are barely literate and have no vocational skills make a living? While searching for jobs in the city with the help of relatives and friends is, ostensibly, a good way out, it also comes with substantial risks. Unfortunately, once entrusted to someone treacherous, these children often fall into the predicament of being trafficked, forced into backbreaking labour in hazardous environments, violated, or even forced to take obscene images to be sold on the internet, which causes profound physical and mental trauma that follows them for an inordinate length of time.

CEDAR and its partners create a safe environment for children to grow healthily in response to the community's

needs and the team's expertise. In Afghanistan, CEDAR and its partners provide preschool education classes for ethnic minority children to learn the official language used in school. We also offer after-school tutorials for students in grades one to three, where the tutors use their native and official language for class discussions. This helps them build a solid foundation in language and learning, reducing their chance of dropping out of school.

In Thailand, CEDAR's partner explains the situation of human trafficking in high-risk communities to prevent parents and teenagers from walking into the traps of human traffickers, invites government departments to cooperate in combating human trafficking, collects information and evidence to assist law enforcement agencies in rescuing victims of human trafficking and prosecuting human traffickers. Among the 530 people rescued by our partner in 2022, 156 were children under 18, and the three youngest victims were only 12. As many organisations have been focusing on helping women, male victims are often left with insufficient assistance. Therefore, CEDAR's partner has set up shelter centres for male victims specifically to provide safe housing, medical care, and livelihood skills training to prevent them from falling victim to human trafficking.

The global economic downturn has reduced fundraising income for many organisations, and CEDAR is not exempt. Many partners have reported to CEDAR that they have received notices from other supporting organisations to stop or reduce funding. In the face of such a sharp decline in funds and resources, we urge everyone to stay with us and support CEDAR with prayers and donations so we can continue to walk and grow with the children and witness the love and providence of the Lord.



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