



# Islamic Relief Worldwide

CHANGING LIVES THROUGH ORPHAN  
SPONSORSHIP

SUMMARY OF A GLOBAL IMPACT STUDY REVIEWING  
ISLAMIC RELIEF'S ORPHANS PROGRAMME



This document is a summary of the 95 page Global Impact Study produced by Islamic Relief's Orphan and Child Welfare department in collaboration with the Global Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) team and Islamic Relief Country Offices. That full study was published in June 2024, following research funded by Islamic Relief (Islamic Relief) Canada, Islamic Relief UK and Islamic Relief USA.

The full report from the global impact study, pictured above, is available at <https://islamic-relief.org/publications/global-orphans-impact-study/>

**Global impact study report author:**  
Gary N Gamer

**Study team:** Osob Osman, Anwar Ahmed, Murad Pervez, Mahabubar Rahman, Mohammed Moniruzzaman, Aflak Suleman

**Country contributors:** Boureima Issaka (Niger), Habou Illyassou (Niger), Aman Abdo Gena (Ethiopia), Ahmed Wassie (Ethiopia), Francis Macharia (Kenya), Zeitun Aftin (Kenya), Abdul Hadi (Pakistan), Azhar Rehan Saifi (Pakistan), Marzina Akter (Bangladesh), Tayyub Tazammul (Bangladesh), Ela Nurhayati (Indonesia), Rizky Mohamad (Indonesia), Dzanela Babic (Albania), Genta Akulli (Albania), Munir Rabie (Lebanon), Farah Saifan (Lebanon), Hadeel Hassoun (Lebanon)

**Global contributors:** Claire Bedwell-Thomas, Juwairiyah Khurram

## FOREWORD

Child sponsorship plays a huge part in the delivery of international aid to poor communities through non-government organisations. A study involving 200 such organisations in 2013 put the value of the funds raised annually across the world at \$3.3 billion, with an estimated 10 million children under sponsorship.

Some in the humanitarian community are critical of child sponsorship schemes, saying they are more marketing than substance and promote paternalism and dependency. It is important for those of us who believe in and operate these programmes to critically examine what concrete and clear benefits sponsorship delivers for the children it supports, and to do all we can to empower the families of sponsored children to lift themselves out of extreme poverty.

It is with this aim in mind that Islamic Relief has conducted the first global research study looking closely at the impact of our Orphan Sponsorship Programme (OSP), which currently supports 93,000 children in 27 countries. This document summarises the key findings of that research, which make for very encouraging reading.

Orphans are mentioned 23 times in the Holy Qur'an, which emphasises the responsibility of all believers to care for orphans in need. The OSP is Islamic Relief's practical response to religious obligation, real human need and hard economic reality: children who have lost one or both of their parents are more likely to be living in poverty, and less likely to get the education they need.

What our researchers have found is that children enrolled in the OSP are more likely to go to school and less likely to drop out, which meets one of our core objectives. The research also indicates that the benefits of the OSP go much further, with the guardians of orphaned children reporting real improvements in income and in family health and wellbeing. In countries where we are adapting the OSP by enrolling guardians into self-help groups (SHGs), there is positive evidence of families and communities working together to build self-reliant livelihoods and put extreme poverty behind them.

This research has given us Islamic Relief many practical pointers for how we can tackle some of the limitations of the OSP and build on its success. We are determined to work hard to get our staffing ratios and sponsorship stipend levels right across the programme; to sharpen the targeting and eligibility criteria for the OSP; and to embed SHGs, extra-curricular activities for children and livelihoods training as standard in all countries – acting on the recommendations captured at the end of this document.

We sincerely hope that the recommendations of the researchers and the full impact study report will be a useful resource for a wide range of other aid agencies dedicated to continuously improving the quality and effectiveness of orphan and child sponsorship programmes. We also hope that the evidence we have gathered and the further improvements we are committed to making will be a positive encouragement to the generous orphan sponsors and committed Islamic Relief member offices who underpin the success of the OSP – we really value your ongoing support.



**Aflak Suleman**  
Head of Orphans,  
Child Welfare and  
Seasonal



**Osob Osman**  
Global Accountability  
and Learning Lead

# INTRODUCTION



Since the 1980s Islamic Relief Worldwide has operated an OSP to support orphaned children and their families. This document is a summary of the first global study to evaluate the impact of the OSP.

The purpose of the study was to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the programme is affecting orphaned children, their guardian caregivers and households, and the communities where they live. This summary version provides a snapshot of the study that we hope will be both accessible and instructive in its own right. We want to ensure that the findings of the research reach a wider audience, while also encouraging specialists and practitioners in the arena of orphan and child sponsorship to look at the full report.

The full study, published in June 2024, runs to 95 pages. It is based on a rich variety of qualitative and quantitative data gathered from February to July 2023 and provides in-depth analysis of the benefits of orphan sponsorship. It contains a range of recommendations for building on and improving the OSP that will serve the Islamic Relief family in the next phase of the programme's development.

Tackling poverty and supporting education were at the root of Islamic Relief's original OSP – providing regular financial support to meet the basic needs of the families of orphaned children and enable children to go to school. Our global impact study looked at the effects of today's OSP, which supports 93,000 children in 27 countries, on those two core issues of poverty alleviation and educational access and attainment. The study also assessed other benefits in areas such as health, economic empowerment, protection, rights and participation.

The full study provides a comparative analysis of wellbeing outcomes for different models of OSP implementation in different countries across time frames of being in sponsorship, from children enrolled more recently to rightsholders 'graduating' from the programme – primarily when they finish school and/or age out of the programme.

## The main forms of child sponsorship

Child sponsorship generates billions of pounds for non-profit humanitarian agencies to assist children and their families each year. Sponsorship programmes target children, families and communities that typically are very poor and/or have other vulnerabilities such as orphanhood, disabilities, and living in disaster-prone areas.

There are essentially three types of sponsorship models:

Individual child sponsorship (ICS) in which the child receives support, often through a direct conditional cash transfer (DCCT) to them or their caregiver. This is a social protection method, similar to government cash transfer programmes.

Community development child sponsorship (CDCS), where a sponsor receives a report on the child they are sponsoring, but the money donated is pooled for community-wide initiatives and improvement in wellbeing.

Rights-based child sponsorship (RBCS), a variation on CDCS in which social mobilisation and advocacy are key components. Again there is a pooling of funds for the benefit of the whole community, but the emphasis is on improving wellbeing through social mobilisation and rights-based advocacy – aiming for improved access to services and support, for example.

There are variations on all the above models. Some child sponsorship programmes combine components – by having individual sponsorships that are intertwined with community development projects and/or rights-based approaches, for example. Additionally, some programmes assist children through family sponsorship.

Islamic Relief's OSP approach – fundamentally an ICS approach into which elements of community development and social mobilisation are being progressively built – is set out on page 5.

# FOCUS AND METHODOLOGY

Islamic Relief conducted research for this global impact study using a mix of quantitative and qualitative elements.

A quantitative household survey was conducted with orphan guardians who were overwhelmingly widowed mothers, but also some other caregivers such as grandparents, in seven sampled countries. The countries surveyed were Albania, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Niger and Pakistan. A total of 2,755 households were surveyed with a target 95 per cent confidence level and five per cent margin of error.

In five countries selected to ensure geographic and programmatic diversity, data was also gathered through qualitative means: Ethiopia, Indonesia, Lebanon, Niger and Pakistan.

Qualitative methods included focus group discussions, key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders and household visits. The research also involved an extensive review of documents to inform the study tools, processes, data, and recommendations.

The ultimate goal was to provide insights into the effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of the OSP, with the findings intended to guide potential changes to the programme.

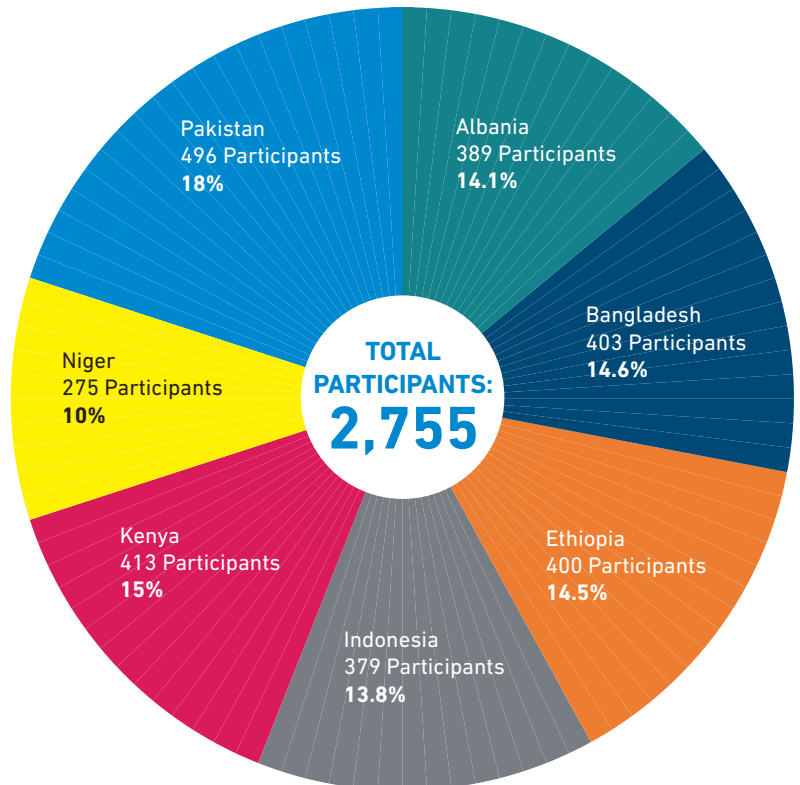
Lebanon was initially selected for the household survey, but our research there could not be finished because of logistical challenges with the authorities. In Niger, the sample size in the household survey was reduced due to safety factors resulting from a military coup.

The qualitative study was conducted from approximately mid-February through to the end of April 2023, while the quantitative household survey was carried out after Ramadan, from late April into July.

The participants in the household survey were randomly selected. Participants in the qualitative study involving focus groups and household visits were selected both randomly and purposively, based on demographics, types of OSP programmes and other criteria.



## Breakdown of household survey participants



## Breakdown of qualitative research participants

| Country                            | Indonesia | Ethiopia | Niger | Lebanon | Pakistan | Total |
|------------------------------------|-----------|----------|-------|---------|----------|-------|
| Focus groups of guardians          | 6         | 8        | 9     | 5       | 9        | 37    |
| Focus groups of children and youth | 7         | 9        | 3     | 3       | 6        | 28    |
| Household visits                   | 18        | 10       | 10    | 10      | 12       | 60    |
| Key informant interviews           | 17        | 8        | 8     | 10      | 12       | 55    |

## Islamic Relief's approach to orphan sponsorship



Eligibility for Islamic Relief's OSP is based on two key factors:

- The orphanhood status of the child, meaning one or both parents are deceased, with the vast majority of children enrolling having lost a father and having a widowed mother as their guardian
- Confirmation that the household concerned is in poverty, defined through a scoring process.

The central theory of change goal for the OSP is to achieve changes in the quality of life of sponsored orphans so that they can achieve their full potential. The desired impact, as per the OSP log-frame, is to enhance the quality of life and socio-economic wellbeing of participating families through education and improved health, including nutrition and mental and physical wellbeing.

Islamic Relief's standard OSP is a cash transfer model, with stipends paid to the child's guardian funded through sponsors around the world at a monthly rate of €33-48 euros per child (approximately £28-41 GBP) depending on the country. Sponsorship generally lasts until the child reaches the age of 18 but can be extended to 24 years in special circumstances where additional support is required, such as for medical or educational needs.

A second OSP model, also involving cash transfers through sponsorship, is organised around SHGs of guardians, mostly women who are widowed with at least one orphaned child under sponsorship. These groups add value to the more basic sponsorship approach by offering mutual support, savings and loans facilities, other family support, and empowerment activities for women. Among the countries featured in this impact study, a significant number of guardians are organised into SHGs in Bangladesh, Niger and Ethiopia.

In addition to these two approaches, Islamic Relief Bangladesh operates what is effectively a 'OSP Plus' graduation model approach with sponsored children, called the Alternative Livelihoods for Orphans (ALO) programme. The term 'graduation' has two meanings in this context:

There is an orphans-specific meaning pertaining to when a sponsored young person reaches the age of 18 and thus 'graduates' from school or college and the OSP. At this point the guardian of the household is selected for support from the graduation programme, in this case the ALO.

The broader use of the term in the humanitarian sector signifies 'graduating' from poverty. This ties to the goal of strengthening the economic self-sufficiency of the household so it is no longer dependent on OSP financial support.

In the ALO model, women guardians are given the equivalent of three to four years of sponsorship donations for investment, and this is invested in individual SHG funds. The group then receive technical assistance from Islamic Relief staff, including guidance on saving, accessing credit and spending; training on market assessment and income generation; and learning on a wide range of other topics such as sanitation, nutrition, parenting, and accessing government social safety net and extension services.

Households in the ALO model were not surveyed for this impact study, as they were surveyed previously in 2019. A report published in 2020 found that the ALO had had considerable impact on households across many domains of wellbeing.

## KEY FINDINGS

The positive impact of the OSP on education cannot be over-stated. The programme puts disadvantaged students at least on equal footing with other students not facing the same difficult challenges. School attendance rates are high and drop-out rates are low among children enrolled in the OSP.

Hunger remains a persistent challenge in some OSP households, with about a quarter of families reporting food shortages. Most households told us, however, that the situation is significantly better for them now than it was before they were enrolled in the OSP – a positive change attributed to the programme and the sponsorship stipends it provides.

The vast majority of OSP households in the study (91 per cent) were above the internationally recognised extreme poverty threshold, with a third of guardians perceiving that they had grown out of extreme poverty. It is clear that there has been significant positive movement of OSP families from “extreme poverty” to “poor” and from “poor” to “not so poor” wealth categories.

Another significant finding is that guardian participation in self-help groups (SHGs) – a relatively small but growing element of Islamic Relief’s OSP globally – can be a real gamechanger in delivering a range of notable benefits for participating households. SHGs enhance the ability of their members to save, access credit, develop sustainable livelihoods, grow income, and provide social capital in their neighbourhoods.

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recommends five key criteria for assessing the value of aid and development programmes: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The independent researcher who spearheaded our global impact study and wrote the research report rates the OSP as ‘good’ in three categories (relevance, effectiveness and sustainability) and ‘high’ – his top rating – for efficiency and impact.

Women accounted for 93 per cent of the guardians participating in our research, and 86 per cent of the overall sample were widowed mothers – the main category of primary caregivers across the OSP. Most guardians (61 per cent) were in the 30–49 age bracket, while a third (34 per cent) were 50 or over. Nearly half (47 per cent) had had no schooling. Four out of five households covered by the research (80 per cent) had one child in the OSP, while 20 per cent had two or more. Children with disabilities make up 5 per cent of OSP children in the countries we researched.

Generally, our researchers found that guardians express overall satisfaction with the OSP. They are most satisfied with the home visits component of programmes and the behaviour of Islamic Relief staff. They are also satisfied, though less so, with the amount and frequency of the cash stipends they receive. Among the lowest satisfaction levels are those pertaining to the levels of training and skills development being provided.

There are variances in satisfaction levels between countries on some issues. Islamic Relief’s OSP field workers in some countries have staff-to-rightsholder ratios that are not practical for effective case work, and this leads to burnout and lost opportunities to improve the wellbeing of OSP households. This is an issue that must be addressed, and it features prominently in the research report’s recommendations.

There are mixed results on the impact of OSP delivery in collaboration with ‘external’ partners outside Islamic Relief country offices. In Aceh, Indonesia, results achieved through partnership are consistent with those of Islamic Relief-administered delivery. In Lebanon, with regard to OSP support to refugees specifically, there appears to be much less positive impact in wellbeing categories when compared to other countries of the study.

Extra-curricular activities for children outside of school are low in most countries of the study but the positive value of these activities where implemented indicates that they should be incorporated more widely.

Only in the ALO programme in Bangladesh, among the sample countries, have government extensionists been successfully engaged through advocacy in providing services to OSP rightsholders – an achievement that the researchers want Islamic Relief to aspire to across the OSP.

Over the next six pages, we elaborate further on the impact of the OSP in critical areas such as education, health, poverty alleviation and economic empowerment.

## DELIVERING REAL VALUE

This first global impact study contains a rich variety of data capturing the impact of Islamic Relief's OSP. The picture it paints is overwhelmingly positive, with the report also highlighting shortcomings and areas for improvement and further development.

In this section of the summary, we dig deeper into some of the key findings already highlighted on page 6, looking most closely at the key areas of education, health, poverty alleviation, and economic empowerment. We also touch on the important issues of shelter, protection, and participation and inclusion, as well as fulfilling basic rights.

### Education

OSP guardians understand that the support they receive is tied to students staying in school, so they tend to invest their stipends mostly in education and meeting household food needs. Our research found that school dropout rates were below 2 per cent in Albania and Pakistan, below 1 per cent in Ethiopia and Indonesia and zero in Kenya and Niger – despite the proportion of children out of school overall being as high as 23.1 per cent in Pakistan and 49.7 per cent in Niger.

As well as getting children into school and keeping them there, our research found that the OSP helps build children's motivation, courage, pride and confidence to succeed in their studies. The students supported by the OSP stay in school well beyond the national average drop-out time, and they have attendance rates that exceed the average too.

Guardians and students told us that OSP school students are at least equal or even ahead in school performance compared to their peers. This impact is directly attributable to the OSP, according to guardians and the sponsored students themselves.

The positive educational impact of the OSP stems from the conditionality that links sponsorship to students staying in school, and the use of the OSP stipend for spending on educational inputs. With weak public educational systems in some sample countries, the stipend helps a quarter of students attend private schools.

Student involvement with madrassas and mosques is regarded as a positive by guardians, who associate it with their children being better students and having value formation that leads to good citizenship and respect for their elders.

### Rates of school dropouts from OSP over the history of country programmes, compared to national out-of-school data <sup>1</sup>

|  | Albania | Bangladesh    | Ethiopia | Indonesia | Kenya | Niger | Pakistan |
|--|---------|---------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|----------|
| <b>OSP dropout rate historically</b>                     | 1.1%    | Not available | 0.14%    | 0.82%     | 0%    | 0%    | 1.5%     |
| <b>National primary rates for children out of school</b> | 3.9%    | 6.5%          | 24.5%    | 0.6%      | 4.3%  | 49.7% | 23.1%    |
| <b>Year of national-rates data</b>                       | 2016    | 2019          | 2016     | 2017      | 2019  | 2012  | 2018     |

### Average performance scores of sponsored students at time of survey v before OSP enrolment <sup>2</sup>

| Response                     | Albania          | Bangladesh       | Ethiopia         | Indonesia          | Kenya            | Niger            | Pakistan           | Overall                 |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Excellent</b>             | 16%<br>(was 15%) | 22%<br>(was 5%)  | 13%<br>(was 21%) | 18%<br>(was 15%)   | 26%<br>(was 9%)  | 6%<br>(was 3%)   | 21%<br>(unchanged) | <b>18%</b><br>(was 13%) |
| <b>Good</b>                  | 64%<br>(was 67%) | 45%<br>(was 43%) | 56%<br>(was 38%) | 63%<br>(unchanged) | 67%<br>(was 45%) | 61%<br>(was 29%) | 63%<br>(was 60%)   | <b>60%</b><br>(was 50%) |
| <b>Average</b>               | 16%<br>(was 14%) | 24%<br>(was 31%) | 26%<br>(was 28%) | 16%<br>(was 20%)   | 6%<br>(was 39%)  | 27%<br>(was 45%) | 11%<br>(was 16%)   | <b>17%</b><br>(was 27%) |
| <b>Poor</b>                  | 3%<br>(was 2%)   | 1%<br>(was 9%)   | 4%<br>(was 10%)  | 0%                 | 0%<br>(was 5%)   | 4%<br>(was 17%)  | 1%<br>(unchanged)  | <b>2%</b><br>(was 6%)   |
| <b>Don't know/ no answer</b> | 1%<br>(was 2%)   | 9%<br>(was 12%)  | 1%<br>(was 2%)   | 3%<br>(was 3%)     | 1%<br>(was 2%)   | 2%<br>(was 6%)   | 3%<br>(was 1%)     | <b>3%</b><br>(was 4%)   |

<sup>1</sup> Source: Our World in Data, citing sources from World Bank and UN agencies, found at <https://ourworldindata.org/global-education>

<sup>2</sup> As reported by their guardians

## Hunger and health

Food consumption is at an “acceptable” level for 70 per cent of the households we surveyed, with 19 per cent “borderline” and 11 per cent at “poor” levels. Our research found that the OSP has had a positive impact on levels of hunger overall, but the numbers of families still going hungry suggests that reducing hunger should be built into the programme more systematically as a fundamental goal.

Access to health care does not appear to be an area of significant variance for OSP households compared to others in the local population, though higher-quality health care is out of reach for most because of high costs.

Having said this, most OSP households (66 per cent) are in better general health than before they received OSP support, and this is attributed to the OSP. This is especially true for the emotional health of guardians, with less stress and worry leading to greater functionality in daily living and parenting.

Our household survey data suggests there is some growth in the incidence of illness for OSP guardians and children since the period before they entered sponsorship. Qualitative information does not confirm this, though illnesses such as malaria seem to be persistent in some countries.

Covid-19 has not been a major health issue for most households in the survey, except for in Albania. The impact of the pandemic has been mostly twofold: economic challenges, and loss of learning linked to enforced downtime in schooling. OSP-supported families characterise the OSP stipend support as having been a “life saver” during the Covid-19 emergency.

Our research found that 20-25 per cent of OSP families had experienced improvements in sanitary conditions – acquiring latrines, for example – and in water quality while they have been in sponsorship. This is tied in part, but not strongly, to OSP support.

## Responses to survey question: ‘Which of the following best describes your health?’

| Response  | Albania | Bangladesh | Ethiopia | Indonesia | Kenya | Niger | Pakistan | Overall |
|---|---------|------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|----------|---------|
| <b>1 - It is much better now than before sponsorship/Islamic Relief support</b> | 9%      | 58%        | 19%      | 34%       | 14%   | 49%   | 19%      | 27%     |
| <b>2 - It is a little better</b>  | 37%     | 32%        | 31%      | 21%       | 70%   | 41%   | 41%      | 39%     |
| <b>3 - It is about the same</b>   | 38%     | 1%         | 29%      | 41%       | 15%   | 8%    | 19%      | 22%     |
| <b>4 - It is worse</b>  | 13%     | 8%         | 21%      | 4%        | 0%    | 1%    | 21%      | 11%     |
| <b>Does not know/ no answer</b>   | 3%      | 0%         | 1%       | 0%        | 1%    | 1%    | 1%       | 1%      |

## Responses to survey question: ‘Did sponsorship/Islamic Relief support, help to make water quality improvement possible?’<sup>3</sup>

| Response   | Albania     | Bangladesh  | Ethiopia    | Indonesia   | Kenya       | Niger       | Pakistan    | Overall     |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>1 - Yes, primarily through education on water treatment</b>                                     | 0%          | 41%         | 0%          | 0%          | 15%         | 6%          | 2%          | 9%          |
| <b>2 - Yes, it would not have been possible otherwise without Islamic Relief financial support</b> | 0%          | 27%         | 1%          | 1%          | 20%         | 13%         | 1%          | 9%          |
| <b>3 - It helped somewhat through Islamic Relief financial support</b>                             | 0%          | 10%         | 9%          | 1%          | 14%         | 9%          | 1%          | 6%          |
| <b>4 - No, it did not much help</b>  | 0%          | 0%          | 3%          | 0%          | 1%          | 0%          | 1%          | 1%          |
| <b>5 - The support came from other sources not connected to the project</b>                        | 1%          | 2%          | 0%          | 0%          | 0%          | 2%          | 1%          | 1%          |
| <b>6 - Don't know/no answer</b>  | 0%          | 1%          | 2%          | 0%          | 0%          | 0%          | 0%          | 1%          |
| <b>Grand Total</b>   | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> |

<sup>3</sup> This question was put to the 19 per cent of survey respondents overall – ranging from 1% in Indonesia to 56% in Bangladesh – who had said the quality of their water had improved in the period of participation in the OSP/benefiting from Islamic Relief programmes.



## Poverty and economic empowerment

Almost nine out of ten of our survey respondents (87 per cent) said support from the OSP or Islamic Relief had helped their families improve their economic status, with only 6 per cent saying their finances had not changed for the better. Most guardians reported that OSP support had contributed positively to their families moving out of extreme poverty, with about half saying strongly that this was the case.<sup>4</sup>

There is good general understanding among participants in the OSP that we surveyed that livelihood development is an important potential use of OSP support. Unfortunately, the OSP falls short in offering the training and support many guardians say they need for income generation and livelihoods development – with the positive exception of programmes that have built-in SHGs as a key programme component. Livelihoods orientation is occurring, but across the OSP it is falling short of what guardians want and need, particularly in countries without SHG programme components.

Households where guardians are in SHGs show a greater capacity to grow out of poverty, and even more so with graduation programmes such as ALO

in Bangladesh where there is specific support for livelihoods development. We found that accessing credit and accumulating savings are limited or non-existent options for households not in SHGs, whereas 59 per cent of SHG members said they had been able to save money that they had spent on income-generating activities. Government social safety nets for widows and orphans are limited or entirely absent in most countries featured in our study.

Practical help with managing finances is important if OSP guardians are to increase their savings and invest in household priorities, and this element occurs in some of our OSP programmes.

The purchasing power of the sponsorship stipend has gone down for most countries in the study over the last ten years, aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic, when adjusted for inflation and exchange rate fluctuations – particularly so in Lebanon, Pakistan and Ethiopia due to economic crises in these countries. Addressing this concern is one of the key recommendations from the global impact study.

## Percentages of surveyed households above the extreme poverty threshold

|  | Niger | Kenya | Albania | Pakistan | Bangladesh | Indonesia | Ethiopia | Overall    |
|--|-------|-------|---------|----------|------------|-----------|----------|------------|
| <b>Current proportion above threshold</b><br>(at time of survey) | 99%   | 98%   | 96%     | 92%      | 92%        | 87%       | 77%      | <b>91%</b> |
| <b>Pre- sponsorship</b>  | 74%   | ?     | 84%     | 58%      | 58%        | 85%       | 54%      | <b>68%</b> |
| <b>Percentage who have grown out of extreme poverty</b>          | 34%   |       | 14%     | 37%      | 37%        | 0.02%     | 43%      | <b>34%</b> |

## Responses to survey question: 'Did sponsorship/Islamic Relief support help your household to improve its economic status?'

| Response   | Albania | Bangladesh | Ethiopia | Indonesia | Kenya | Niger | Pakistan | Overall    |
|--|---------|------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|----------|------------|
| <b>It helped somewhat</b>  | 63%     | 32%        | 42%      | 16%       | 61%   | 51%   | 46%      | <b>44%</b> |
| <b>Yes, it would not have been possible otherwise</b>  | 22%     | 42%        | 39%      | 79%       | 31%   | 47%   | 46%      | <b>43%</b> |
| <b>My economic status has not improved since sponsorship</b>                                       | 6%      | 25%        | 2%       | 3%        | 0%    | 1%    | 3%       | <b>6%</b>  |
| <b>No, it did not much help - the support came from other sources not connected to the project</b> | 5%      | 1%         | 6%       | 1%        | 8%    | 1%    | 2%       | <b>3%</b>  |
| <b>Don't know/no answer</b>  | 5%      | 1%         | 11%      | 1%        | 0%    | 0%    | 3%       | <b>3%</b>  |

<sup>5</sup> A note of caution that needs to be mentioned in relation to this finding is that perhaps two-thirds of guardians may not have come into the OSP at the extreme poverty level.



## Shelter

Shelter is not a significant use of the OSP stipend in most of the countries where our study was conducted, except in Lebanon where there is a real crisis of availability and affordability when it comes to shelter. Many guardians across the study either own their homes or are living for free with relatives and family friends – or in government-donated homesteads in the case of Ethiopia.

Most guardians have not renovated their homes or made improvements because of the prohibitive cost of doing so. There were households in Niger, and especially also in Bangladesh, who reported investing in home renovation or improvement. This is most likely due to those families being involved in SHGs and being able to build up savings through this – another indication of the added value that SHGs bring as part of OSP implementation.

## Protection

The vast majority of guardians, children and young people generally feel safe in their communities. Most guardians felt this before sponsorship began, but about a quarter feel safer due to involvement in the OSP. The notable exception to this is fear of theft and associated violence in some communities, primarily those in densely populated urban areas.

Participants in the ALO programme in Bangladesh said that being organised into SHGs enabled them to protect themselves better – through better understanding of their rights, collective assistance for individuals facing hardship, and stronger connections with the police, schools, clinics and municipal offices (2020 report). Some guardians participating in our first OSP global impact study said that receiving the orphan stipend affords them greater safety and protection because it means they can invest a little more in things like stronger doors and locks, safer-access latrines at home and safe transportation.

Early marriage of non-adult children is a concern, identified as occurring by about a quarter of guardians in their communities (though not necessarily in their households). About a third of guardians who confirmed that early marriage was prevalent said it was widespread. It is a particular concern in Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Kenya among the countries where our research was carried out.

## Rights and participation

Women are prominent among the poorest people in developing countries – the most disadvantaged educationally, economically and in terms of service provision. Levels of poverty and disadvantage are often exacerbated for widows with children, grappling with cost-of-living challenges as sole breadwinners or without any regular income.

Our research found that where women experience the double benefit of OSP support and access to SHGs, this has positive impact on their ability to make choices affecting their lives and to act on them.

Despite the benefits of the OSP and SHGs, however, close to one in three guardian widows in the study reported not having received their inheritance, with particularly high numbers in Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan and Ethiopia. The OSP can play a part in supporting advocacy for inheritance rights, and this is reflected in one of the key recommendations from this study.

## Guardians' membership of Islamic Relief self-help groups and other cooperative groups

| Response                                    | Bangladesh | Ethiopia | Indonesia | Kenya | Niger | Pakistan | Overall    |
|---|------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|----------|------------|
| <b>Islamic Relief SHG</b>                   | 93%        | 93%      | 0%        | 41%   | 96%   | 18%      | <b>83%</b> |
| <b>Coop related to another organisation</b> | 2%         | 0%       | 83%       | 4%    | 3%    | 3%       | <b>6%</b>  |
| <b>Government-affiliated coop</b>           | 1%         | 3%       | 13%       | 0%    | 0%    | 0%       | <b>1%</b>  |
| <b>Other</b>                                | 4%         | 3%       | 5%        | 56%   | 1%    | 79%      | <b>10%</b> |

## Use or investment of self-help group savings reported by guardians in membership of SHGs

| Response  | Bangladesh | Ethiopia | Indonesia | Kenya | Niger | Pakistan | Overall    |
|---|------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------|----------|------------|
| <b>For income generating activities</b>                                 | 74%        | 45%      | 53%       | 52%   | 63%   | 13%      | <b>59%</b> |
| <b>To fulfil basic household needs (e.g. food)</b>                      | 44%        | 35%      | 70%       | 81%   | 86%   | 41%      | <b>54%</b> |
| <b>For children's education</b>   | 58%        | 16%      | 38%       | 69%   | 39%   | 31%      | <b>42%</b> |
| <b>As insurance for big emergencies (e.g. food insecurity, medical)</b> | 19%        | 14%      | 5%        | 7%    | 57%   | 23%      | <b>25%</b> |
| <b>For social obligations (e.g. weddings, holidays)</b>                 | 21%        | 0%       | 0%        | 33%   | 34%   | 21%      | <b>18%</b> |
| <b>Other</b>  | 15%        | 22%      | 3%        | 17%   | 7%    | 28%      | <b>15%</b> |

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The positive outcomes captured in this study reflect an Orphan Sponsorship Programme that is already having a profound impact on the lives of orphaned children and their families. The donors who support the OSP so generously can feel reassured and affirmed by the transformational difference their support is making.

There is potential to achieve so much more by building on the learning from the successful and ground-breaking ALO project in Bangladesh and integrating SHGs across the OSP, as this study has confirmed SHGs to be a key factor in empowering people to lift themselves out of poverty.

The global impact study's key independent researcher and author, Gary N Gamer, has put forward 12 key areas of recommendations for Islamic Relief to take forward in the development of its OSP. Some of these are Islamic Relief-specific, but many provide pointers for how others operating child and orphan sponsorship programmes can also hone their approach.

## Sharpen targeting and eligibility criteria

- Islamic Relief should develop a clear definition of poverty and how to measure it, and targeting of the OSP should be clarified to ensure that key poverty indicators frame eligibility.
- All new sponsorship intakes should be reviewed against a standard Islamic Relief set of household economic measurements to establish baselines to measure potential growth out of poverty. This, at a minimum, should involve data on income, assets, and credit.
- Changes should be made to the OSP's Domains of Change and logical frameworks to improve the inclusion of rural families and children with disabilities, both currently under-represented.

## Review and address stipend levels regularly

- The OSP should monitor stipend purchasing power at least once a year, developing and implementing strategies to mitigate loss of value such as short-term supplementary financial or in-kind assistance.
- Steps should be taken to ensure that the cost of basic necessities is a key component in determining longer-term setting of sponsorship amounts.
- Islamic Relief should consider establishing a minimum 'quality of service' standard for timely arrival of sponsorship stipends, to reduce late payments.

## Improve staffing ratios

- Islamic Relief should establish minimum effective staff-to-rightsholder ratios that apply across the OSP, based on concrete factors of geographic spread, scope of responsibilities and household demographics.

## Prioritise tackling hunger

- A goal for the OSP should be the elimination of hunger in OSP households, and tackling hunger should be prioritised in the OSP Domains of Change and log-frame.
- Households in Ethiopia and Kenya have significant challenges in hunger and food consumption, and this should be a strong immediate focus to bring families up to acceptable levels.

## Embed and expand self-help groups within the programme

- SHGs are a proven gamechanger. Over the medium term (approximately three years), the OSP should integrate all qualifying OSP households into SHGs, if not graduation programmes like ALO, as a standard programme component.
- The money management process in Indonesia has had a positive impact and should be considered for all countries that do not have or are integrating into SHG-style OSP models.

## Invest in livelihoods development

- This should be a top strategic priority for the OSP through the use of with SHGs and/or ALO-type graduation approach programmes models with sponsored children.
- Islamic Relief and its partners should assess strategies to tap into government extension resources more comprehensively as part of expanding graduation programmes within the OSP.

## Broaden assessment of educational value

- In home visit reporting, OSP field workers should gather information on non-sponsored students in the household, and their school performance, in order to monitor and evaluate additional educational benefits for the families supported.

## Monitor and address health over time

- Each Islamic Relief country office should capture and analyse health data and use it to adjust programmes to do more to deliver improved health.
- All new sponsorship intakes should have a standard Islamic Relief set of household health measurements to establish baselines to measure their health over time. As a minimum, this should include food consumption, incidence of illness, emotional health status, and access to health care.



#### Deliver extra-curricular activities for children as standard

- Islamic Relief should consider promoting extracurricular activities as a standard component of the OSP, consistent with the OSP's Domains of Change. Child clubs in Bangladesh's ALO programme (graduation model approach) are a potential model for broader adaptation in other countries – among other opportunities, such as partnership activities with local mosques.

#### Advocate for inheritance rights and social safety nets

- The OSP should further explore the dynamics behind the high numbers of widows who have not been able to access their rightful inheritance, and it should introduce programme components to help advocate for those affected and reduce these numbers.
- Islamic Relief should consider assessing and prioritising collaboration with other nonprofits in advocating for social safety nets and inclusion of OSP households in these programmes. Linking OSP rightsholder guardians to this support should be a core OSP service component.

#### Critically evaluate delivery through partnerships

- Unless OSP delivery partnerships involving groups outside Islamic Relief can be properly funded and operated with development models that deliver impact, Islamic Relief should find other programmes to support in countries of Islamic Relief presence.

#### Sustain and deepen ongoing evaluation

- The OSP's theory of change and log frames should be strengthened to be less aspirational and more practically applicable, with a more robust system of reporting against relevant indicators.
- Islamic Relief should use this Global Impact Study, or an adaptation of it, as a framework and baseline for future impact evaluation.



**Islamic Relief Worldwide**

19 Rea Street South  
Birmingham  
B5 6LB  
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 121 605 5555  
Fax: +44 121 622 5003

[irw@irworldwide.org](mailto:irw@irworldwide.org)  
[www.islamic-relief.org](http://www.islamic-relief.org)

Registered Charity No. 328158  
Registered Company No. 02365572

