**Christmas parties 2017 – Summary report**

**This Christmas, over 9,500 children attended a Christmas Party** supported by Viva.This is over double the number of children who attended a party last year, so double the number of children enjoying the day, engaging with the network, and leaving knowing more about God, feeling valued.

Whilst the parties are all about giving children a great time, encouragement, new learning and knowledge, they also serve as a source of encouragement for new members, help to build the reputation of the networks, and contribute to the possibility of building larger collective action programmes for children. Christmas parties are a catalyst for better-connected care for vulnerable children.

**KEY NUMBERS:**

Number of networks organising Christmas Parties: 18

Number of Parties: 49

Number of churches and organisations involved: 193

Total number of children who attended a party: 9,791(30% previously unreached by the network)

Average cost per child: $2.92 USD

Grants given by Viva: $9,964.49 USD (35% of total expenditure)

**ACTIVITIES**

Thousands of children this Christmas enjoyed parties with games, dances, performances, sports, quizzes, stories and guest characters. These activities help to treat the children and let them know that they are loved and precious as members of society and to God. Ideas for fun activities at the parties ranged from a **Christmas skit in Bengaluru**, India to a **modelling show in Uganda**, a **puppet show in Hyderabad**, India to a **song competition in Myanmar**.

**THEMES**

In addition to teaching about Christmas Story, some networks included teaching on topical issues:

* Across the networks in **India**, lessons on Good Touch Bad Touch, **child protection and good treatment** were given in a fun and interactive way
* Networks in the **Philippines** taught children about **safety online**.
* In **Zimbabwe,** the network focused on observing the law with the aim of **reducing crime and conflict**.
* A number of networks combined their Christmas party with Viva’s **Good Treatment Campaign**.
* **Building young leaders** was a particular focus for the network in **Paraguay.** The organisers said that for many network members “*it was a new way of working in a concrete way to train adolescents and children leaders with the capacity to generate changes in their environment***.”**

**JUST A PARTY?**

Viva’s Christmas parties are intended to impact children who attend beyond the fun of the initial party. With nearly a third of children who attend a party having not previously been connected, these parties provide an invaluable opportunity to connect new children to services the network is providing and meet their needs. A good follow-up plan is essential in order to achieve this and most networks gave details of their follow-up strategy.

In **Eastern Samar, the Philippines** the network aims to raise young and fruitful leaders. “*If the children are raised to be socially concerned and aware, ESCRAN believes that this would cause a long lasting impact not only on the lives of the 'reached' children through this event but also on the community and society they live in. Primarily, we are planning to nurture them as Children and Youth Advocates for Child Protection by letting them continually involved in the activities, teach them through leadership trainings, and be able to grow and multiply.*”

The network in Venezuela is planning to build on the fact that families of the children often came to the events by following up with training on ‘**Why Families Matter**’ to help improve parenting skills and strengthen families.

**IMAPCT ON CHILDREN**

Whilst successful follow-up will determine the longer-term impact on children who attended a party this year, networks have been able to report immediate impacts noted at the parties.

1. **Childhood memories**

This may seem small, but childhood experiences shape children, good deeds and kindness can have a lasting impact, especially when followed up with longer-term communication. From **El Salvador**, the organisers reported, “*When they were entertained at an exclusive party for them, they received the love of Jesus in an experiential way with biblical teachings, in addition to receiving food, toys, piñatas.*” In **Dehradun, India**, children said they liked meeting with children from other project and were able to learn from them.

1. **Relationship with God**

Whilst not all Christmas Parties will have an alter call or record decisions children make, but 3 networks recorded that children made an initial commitment to Christ at their parties. In **Hyderabad, India**, 28 children responded to the alter call to receive Jesus as their personal saviour.

1. **Needs met more effectively**

In the longer term, some networks took the opportunity of engaging with new children at the party to identify needs that are not being met. The network in **Tanzania** reported that the party has increased trust and hope of children and their parents on how the network cares about them. The project was seen as credible and activities encourage many children and parents to participate in the party, whilst some vulnerable children were connected with people who can help them.

**INSPIRING CHURCHES TO WORK TOGETHER**

**3 networks in Myanmar, Shillong, India and Negros, Philippines** held Christmas Parties for the first time ever this year and all reported that their events had been successful. This provided an introduction to collective action that is building trust of churches and organisations and inspire larger collaborative programmes in the future.

Organisers from **Negros, the Philippines** said, “*Reaching out to these children will be a motivation for partner churches to pursue collaborative actions with the network towards a child friendly community. Partner churches were happy with the outcome as they see faces of children delighted with the treat. Inspired of the activity they look forward to be more supportive to the future events which will be initiated by the network for the children.*”

For the network in **Paraguay**, the challenge was engaging churches in a programme that was not explicitly evangelistic and so did not participate. However, they “*remained attentive to what was happening. After seeing all the impact produced in the local government from the Church, guided by Red Viva Paraguay, they began to communicate in the WhatsApp groups saying that the activity was a great blessing and that we must continue working in this way, with this impact in society. In short, the churches have a hard time understanding how to work for real change, and they have to be demonstrated and taught with great patience*.” Now we can hope that next year these churches will be keen to get involved in the running of the Christmas party.

**INCREASING NETWORK POTENTIAL THROUGH HIGHER MEMBERSHIP**

**6 networks** reported that the Christmas Parties helped to attract **new members**, which can expand the reach of the network and its capacity to care for vulnerable children. 2 networks engaged non-members in the running of their Christmas Party. **Uganda** reported that“*Gathering 11 non-member churches together and helping them to see the value of children and the importance of child protection is a vital first step in seeing change in the community. A follow up strategy for training and for engaging the church leaders is now vitally important.*”

**CITY INFLUENCE**

As the parties increase the network membership and are attracting new churches and organisations, they also begin to attract attention from those outside of network membership goals (such as city authorities, media) increasing city-wide influence of the network. This has been evident in 3 networks in particular: **Paraguay, El Salvador** and **Zimbabwe**.

The first Christmas Party run by the network in **Paraguay** was so successful that the Government stepped in to organise two further events. So whilst the process was initiated and led by Red Viva Paraguay, they were “*able to do an impact activity with the Local Government, having a monetary counterpart to more than human resources and very valuable management of time*.”

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTMAS PARTIES**

This year, some networks have continued to run a Christmas Party despite facing immense pressure either financially, environmentally or politically. Despite adversity, networks are choosing to continue to run a Christmas Party for the children in their communities. This is a testament to the high value they place on the significance of Christmas parties. The network in **Venezuela** is a strong example of this. We recently received word from the network that food shortages and medicines in the country are causing crisis. They are having to change the focus of their work to try to find food to feed people in need. The situation is so bad that network staff are unable to feed their own families, yet they are still doing all they can to care for children. Following their Christmas Party this year, the coordinator sent the report to their consultant. Here is a short segment from her email which demonstrates the significance of Christmas parties for this network:

“*We thank the Lord for his provision through Viva to motivate the Churches to organize the Christmas Festival in the midst of the crisis we are living, it has been a shocking experience for the children and their families, who were able to enjoy the provision of God, with the contribution of the Christmas Party Program and the contribution of the Local Church. For the Churches it was also a great experience because they witnessed how they could complete everything to make a good event despite the high prices of the food and toys market. This type of program helps strengthen the local church, especially those who work with children. We ask the Lord for you and bless you greatly in your lives and in the work you do for children throughout the Region*.”