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FEMINIST PEACE SERIES

Crisis as an Opportunity for
Transformative Change



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Saba Hamzah is a Yemeni poet, writer, and educator based in the Netherlands. Her main devices are line and light and the moments in between. Saba's work questions power structures of societies at large using art and literary interventions as tools for social mediation and transformation. Her scholarship activates silences in living archives of women in the conditions of diaspora and exile. Saba has been working on a collection of photo-poetry, *Landless: Our Shared Heaven* (2015-present). This collection examines the interplay of power relations through social mobility issues of state borders, exile, displacement, and deal with themes of war and death, in their many forms. You can find more of her work on her website <https://www.sabahamzah.com/>



Umenjoh Vania Andoumbeni is a young Cameroonian who is a passionate advocate for Gender equality and women empowerment. She is also an advocate for inclusive education, social inclusion and disability rights. She is the founder of the Association for the promotion of Gender and Disabilities Issues (APGDI)-Cameroon. She is a lecturer at Special Educational Needs Teachers Training Institute (SENTTI) and the Principal of SENTTI-IBES Yaounde. She leads the Gender hub of Health Promotion Alliance Cameroon (HPAC). She is also a member of the Global Network of Compassionneers and the Young Africa Leader Initiative (YALI) Network. Vania has a Master of Education (M.Ed) degree in Special Education from the University of Buea in 2015. She equally had her Bachelor of Science (BSc Hon) degree in Women and Gender Studies with Sociology and Anthropology (Double Major) from the University of Buea in 2011. She is of the view that real progress and sustainable development can only be achieved when both men and women are seen as agent of development.



Sharon Eryenyu an African Feminist and Content Creator with a keen interest in women and girls' human rights. She is most satisfied by socially conscious engagements that impact people's lives positively and envisions a society where the ideals of feminism are valued in such a way that women fully embrace their autonomy and agency, build their leadership capacity, and tap into their power. Some of her featured articles can be found in the first edition of the Feminist Peace Series Magazine. She is presently the Communications Officer at Women's International Peace Centre.



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EDITORIAL



Dr Louise Arimatsu
Guest Editor

Welcome to the second edition of the Feminist Peace Series (FPS) an initiative that seeks to give material and normative depth and content to ‘feminist peace’ drawn from everyday practices of feminist peacebuilding. In this edition, we turn our attention to how women and, in particular, feminist peace activists are responding to the direct and indirect consequences of COVID-19 and elaborate on the practical and theoretical implications for ‘feminist peace’, however defined. Implicit in this move is a fluid conception of what ‘peacebuilding’ comprises. In other words, rather than reading the term narrowly and relevant only in relation to conflict (and thus limited by time and space) feminist peacebuilding is conceptualized as an ongoing, dynamic, often radical, and always emancipatory process with transformative ambitions.

The central argument to this series is that in all crisis and recovery processes should be gender responsive, with women involved from the very beginning.

The outbreak of COVID-19 and its rapid yet uneven spread across the globe has prompted a huge (and ever-growing) body of scholarship and critical commentary on the role of the state and international organizations and how systems of power operate, from the local to the global. Critics have noted how the direct effects of the virus have brought into sharp relief the material consequences of dominant ideological and political preferences and of how systems and structures have been

constituted to embed inequalities within and between states exposing the myths upon which elites have maintained and wield power, political, economic and social.

Feminist scholarship has injected a further depth of analysis into these debates drawing attention to the different and often disproportionate effects that state measures to curtail the spread of the virus have had on women and girls due to their sex and gender. This work shows how, notwithstanding legal obligations and commitments made, the failure by states to take account of differences in the process of crafting and applying emergency measures has undone, almost overnight, decades of feminist labor. Existing gender disparities and axes of oppression have deepened, exploitative practices have flourished and violence against women has escalated across the globe. Of course, the adverse effects of this undoing have not been evenly felt, as demonstrated by the contributors to this edition.

Each of the authors was invited to reflect on the implications of the global pandemic – grounded in the local and personal – and framed by their conceptions of feminist peace. To that extent, this collection opens up new epistemological, political and intellectual possibilities enriching feminist knowledge. That the reflections shared also echo so much of what has been observed by fellow feminists in other spaces, is hardly surprising. After all, the co-constitutive power systems that create and normalize hierarchies and exploitation (from patriarchy to militarism, [neo-liberal] capitalism,

and/or [neo]colonialism) may manifest in different guises in different spaces and times but the tracks they bore into the fabric of society – and into the very bodies of women and girls – are replicated across the globe.

Margaret LoWilla's damning critique of the measures taken by African states in response to the pandemic is the backdrop against which she explores the legacies of colonialism. LoWilla identifies the reproduction of the colonial governance model founded on capitalism, militarism and patriarchy as pivotal to understanding the contemporary operation of the post-colonial African state and the structural violence to which it seems wedded. Crisis she urges provides an opportunity to dismantle inherited hierarchies and governance systems. LoWilla's call for a new start, new ways of thinking, new imaginations of collectivity are evocative of Fanon's appeal (*The Wretched of the Earth*), yet her intervention – framed by a commitment to feminist peace – takes Fanon's plea further and in doing so contributes to a rich and growing body of pan-African critical feminist scholarship.

In her essay, **Elizabeth Kisolo Nagudi** traces the gendered consequences of the emergency measures adopted by the Government of Uganda and the multiple ways in which such policies have undermined the rights of women and girls. However, the picture she draws of every day is a complex one in which uniform stories of vulnerability and the need for protection are rejected. Instead, for example, Nagudi points to how the suspension of public transport has led to an increase in women using bicycles, a practice that was previously

shunned as not conforming to gender stereotypes. In other words, crises – whether manmade or natural – can give rise to both regressive and liberating consequences. The point is that the course that any society adopts is always a matter of choice.

The militarized language used by political elites when referring to COVID-19 has been roundly criticized by feminists. Yet, in a provocative move, **Saba Hamzah** speaks of “a new war” prompting us to see the parallels between the gendered effects of state policies to curtail the spread of the virus and the lived and gendered experience of conflict. Hamzah’s poem is a deeply personal act of sharing the trauma of war, of displacement, of flight and stands as a reminder of how states both produce and repetitively reproduce trauma. As with our other contributors, Hamzah’s account is not only about harm and loss but rather of survival. Of course, this begs further questions: why and how it is that for so many, survival itself is all-consuming?

Survival is also a theme that is addressed by **Umenjoh Vania Andoumbeni** in her essay tracing the everyday lives of women and girls in Cameroon. Andoumbeni provides us with an insight into the daily realities of women and girls surviving amidst the armed hostilities in the southern regions of Cameroon, a war that has received comparatively little global attention although it has been ongoing since 2016. But Andoumbeni also draws our attention to the everyday lived experiences of discrimination and violence confronted by women and girls in so-called ‘peaceful’ areas in Cameroon and, in doing so, reminds us of the

artificial distinctions made between peace and conflict. As a step toward realizing feminist peace, Andoumbeni points to the need to set aside false distinctions, recognize how gender systems operate across time and space, in public and in private, and dismantle the edifices that perpetuate conflict and the oppression of women and girls.

Feminist scholarship is more than simply an exercise in critical engagement but one that is committed to political change. And **Sharon Eryenyu’s** essay exemplifies that tradition. The accessibility of Eryenyu’s prose veils the depth and complexity of the arguments that are developed by her with the concept of caretaking centre stage. In concluding Eryenyu notes that “the cascading effects of the COVID-19 crisis are yet to be fully uncovered and appreciated” but what she has deftly mapped out in this piece is a feminist blueprint for change and the first steps towards a meaningful recovery plan for Uganda as well as every other state that failed to meet “the different care needs of their [respective] populations”.

The central argument to this series is that in all crisis and recovery processes should be gender responsive, with women involved from the very beginning. The COVID-19 pandemic will no doubt have long-lasting effects on the struggle for Feminist Peace and gender equality for women and girls worldwide. We need to prioritize a feminist strategy, support women’s movements, and bring women’s voices and leadership to the forefront.

We hope you enjoy reading our second edition of the Feminist Peace Series.

PURSUING FEMINIST PEACE

Towards A More Equal Post-COVID 19 Future



Margaret LoWilla

What is the situation?

The Impact of COVID 19

“COVID 19 has put us all in front of a collective mirror.”¹ The global pandemic and its effects reflect and expose the shortcomings of patriarchal and neoliberal forms of governance, leadership and approaches to peace and security. COVID-19 just like neoliberalism thrives on hierarchies and their interconnections globally and locally.²

1. Moreno-Ruiz, Maria (2020), ‘Rediscovering Neptune: Towards Care, in Covid Stories from East Africa and Beyond: Lived Experiences and Forward-Looking Reflections, (Cameroon: Langaa Publishing)
2. Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2020), ‘COVID 19 the Humbling and Humbled Virus,’ in Covid Stories from East Africa and Beyond: Lived Experiences and Forward-Looking Reflections, (Cameroon: Langaa Publishing)



On one hand, as an equalizer, the pandemic has left institutions in the global north and south alike grappling to keep up with the increasing numbers of infections and the rapid rate at which the virus is mutating. At the global level, the pandemic has dispelled the myth of Western inviolability as their healthcare systems have been overwhelmed. Nationally, unable to access medical treatment abroad, political leaders have had little option but to seek healthcare services from the very institutions in which they underinvested.³

On the other hand, while the pandemic is said to kill without negotiation, not everyone is affected to the same degree.

⁴ The differentiated impact of the virus is evident in observing the experiences of women, youth, the urban poor and rural communities concerning COVID 19 prevention measures. Lockdowns have led to more time spent on unpaid, domestic care which is feminized and invisible. Worse off are women living in poverty, who carry a majority of the domestic work burden while receiving the least support.⁵ Cessation of movement of goods and people have

3. Mwambari, David (2020, April 15), 'The pandemic can be a catalyst for decolonisation in Africa,' Al Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/4/15/the-pandemic-can-be-a-catalyst-for-decolonisation-in-africa>

4. Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2020),

5. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/bp-care-crisis-time-for-global-reevaluation-care-250620-en.pdf>

cut off supply chains that provided basic needs and facilitated small business trade in informal markets. The concept of ‘working from home’ and the shift to using digital technology has excluded a majority of the African population who have no reliable access to electricity, let alone digital devices and services.

Furthermore, COVID 19 is said to have instigated, ‘twin processes of repression and resistance.’⁶ While the pandemic itself is not a cause of political violence, it has certainly pronounced existing inequalities and exposed state inefficiencies in the provision of public goods. In Rwanda, Kenya and South Africa, security forces have been reported to have violated human rights in the use of excessive force to implement curfews. Elsewhere in Guinea, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, authoritarian regimes have manipulated COVID restrictions to quell protests and limit the activities of opposition parties and civil society groups ahead of elections.⁷

Additionally, there has been a notable rise in cases of femicide and sexual and gender-based violence, which has been dubbed the “shadow pandemic” by the United Nations. Liberia, Cameroon, Ethiopia, and Nigeria saw an increase in sexual violence during curfews. South

Kenya faced a teen pregnancy crisis where approximately 4,000 schoolgirls below the age of 19 became pregnant during the lockdown. In most cases, they had allegedly been raped by close relatives⁹.

Africa saw a rise in the gruesome killings of young women.⁸ Kenya faced a teen pregnancy crisis where approximately 4,000 schoolgirls below the age of 19 became pregnant during the lockdown. In most cases, they had allegedly been raped by close relatives.⁹ Similarly in Malawi, school closures left girls at greater risk of abuse by neighbours and family members. South Sudan, in the background of implementing a fragile peace deal, also reported an increase in the cases of gang rape in areas where communal conflicts persisted.¹⁰ Most notable was the gang rape of an 8-year-old girl in her family home, which instigated protests in Juba by women and youth activists who called for justice against perpetrators of sexual violence

6. The Africa Report (22, December, 2020), ‘Africa: ‘Repression & resistance are two key trends heading into 2021,’ <https://www.theafricareport.com/56131/africa-repression-resistance-are-two-key-trends-heading-into-2021/>

7. Ibid

8. DW, ‘Violence against women: Africa’s shadow pandemic,’ <https://www.dw.com/en/africa-pandemic-violence-rape-women/a-55174136>

9. Muswii Enock (2020, June 17), ‘Crisis as 4,000 school girls impregnated in Machakos in the last 4 months alone,’ Citizen Digital, <https://citizentv.co.ke/news/crisis-as-4000-school-girls-impregnated-in-machakos-in-the-last-4-months-alone-335903/>

10. LoWilla, Margaret (2020), ‘Ubuntu, Social Justice and Market Mamas,’ in Covid Stories from East Africa and Beyond: Lived Experiences and Forward-Looking Reflections, (Cameroon: Langaa Publishing)

and the end of rape culture in South Sudan.¹¹

While state repression entrenched distrust and eroded the already thin vertical mutuality between state and society, it also inspired the emergence of social movements. These movements represented civilian populations who shared mutual grievances hence, aligned goals in demanding change. Police brutality in Nigeria instigated the youth-led #EndSARS movement determined to reframe the notion of security towards a people-centred approach. Government efforts to criminalise protests in Zambia and Zimbabwe inspired citizens to leverage the digital space in exercising their civic rights while simultaneously evading state suppression. Individuals took pictures holding placards, with their faces and identity disguised in one way or the other and posted them online. These individual contributions, when woven together, told a cohesive story of solidarity in opposition to authoritarian rule.¹² Surely, the COVID 19 pandemic has revealed that the new generation of young Africans will no longer tolerate 'business as usual' politics that has compromised their peace and security and for so long been a source of their oppression. Owing to advances in digital

technology, the youth are holding their governments to account and building an amalgamation of diverse networks of resistance across the continent.¹³

Maria Moreno Jose Ruiz poses important questions that need reflection, "How have we built our families so that in a situation of lockdown in our homes, gender-based and patriarchal violence has multiplied? Who are these police, military or even private security forces serving considering that in so many countries in the name of enforcing new lockdown rules, they have abused, beaten and murdered people? How have we articulated our production and distribution system so that the smallest parenthesis at the workplace leads millions of people directly to hunger? Why is the world more prepared to wage war than to respond to prevent pandemics?"¹⁴

Owing to advances in digital technology, the youth are holding their governments to account and building an amalgamation of diverse networks of resistance across the continent¹³.

11. Akol Priscah (2020, May 16), 'Women activists protest rape cases, demand justice,' Eye Radio, <https://eyeradio.org/women-activists-protest-rape-cases-demand-justice/>
12. Cheeseman Nic and Sishuwa Sishuwa (2020, Sep 11), 'Campaigning together, but on their own,' Mail & Guardian, <https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-09-11-campaigning-together-but-on-their-own/>
13. Amnesty International (2021, April 7), Sub-Saharan Africa: The devastating impact of conflicts compounded by COVID-19, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/04/subsaharan-africa-the-devastating-impact-of-conflicts-compounded/>
14. Moreno-Ruiz, Maria (2020)

How did we get here?

Reflecting on Africa's colonial past

The post-colonial African state adopted capitalist, militaristic and patriarchal ideals of governance.¹⁵ At independence, most African governments pursued the perks of capital markets while disenfranchising and further impoverishing local black Africans. The choice of liberalization can also be interpreted as an attempt by most governments to safeguard their place in the global political and

African governments unquestioningly inherited police organisations that were ruthless, hierarchical, centralised and detached from the community and their needs.



15. Campbell, H (2003), African [Women] a-Liberate Zimbabwe': Review of Reclaiming Zimbabwe: The Exhaustion of the Patriarchal Model of Liberation, (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers).

economic order. Consequently, this rooted a highly unequal distribution of resources, sustained through the systemic exploitation of women, able-bodied youth, the urban poor and rural populations. This trend of the post-colonial African state to protect and promote capital over the needs and wellbeing of the people is demonstrated by the impacts of COVID 19.¹⁶

In terms of security, many post-colonial African countries retained the same colonial model of security, where security forces served at the behest and in the protection of the state, its resources and the governing elite. Independent African governments unquestioningly inherited police organisations that were ruthless, hierarchical, centralised and detached from the community and their needs. Police forces today are deployed to quash any sort of political dissent against sitting regimes. Security then as desired by the people, and provided by the governing elite, are in direct contestation.¹⁷ Following the same greed model of colonial powers, independent governments politicized a parochial police force to guarantee their power and interests in undeveloped

and fragile democratic contexts. The ramifications are seen today in the use of excessive force, police brutality, violation of human rights, and the erosion of community trust in the police and other security institutions.¹⁸

The current era of neoliberal globalization cannot be removed from its patriarchal colonial past which entrenched and continues to undermine, subjugate and violate women.¹⁹ It has been argued that patriarchy is sustained through “culturally condoned systematic institutionalized violence against women,”²⁰ hence is uncondusive to and incompatible with peace.²¹ The post-colonial construction of the African woman’s identity confined in the walls of the home (private sphere), ultimately restricted her participation in political and public life and excluded her from decisions that govern her life.²² Additionally, the undervaluing of women’s labour and restriction of their access to land, capital and livelihoods was an intentional approach to maintain their disempowerment. To date, women’s labour is invisible and unpaid, while they continue to be victimized by violence and excluded from wealth.²³

15. Tofa, Moses (2020, June 4), ‘COVID-19: Time for Africa to Root out the ‘Old Pandemic’, African Leadership Centre COVID 19 Research Op-Ed series, vol. 3, no. 1, <https://africanleadershipcentre.org/index.php/covid-19-research/638-covid-19-time-for-africa-to-root-out-the-old-pandemic>
16. Olonisakin, Funmi (2020)
17. Woods, D. (2007). Conceptual framework for policing in Africa [PDF]. Retrieved from http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/aj/police/india/workshops/conceptual_framework_of_policing_in_africa.pdf
19. Mama, Amina (2014), ‘Beyond Survival: Militarism, Equity and Women’s Security’, Development and Equity, https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004269729/B9789004269729_005.xml
20. Spencer-Wood, Suzanne M. (2016), ‘Feminist Theorizing of Patriarchal Colonialism, Power Dynamics, and Social Agency Materialized in Colonial Institutions,’ International Journal of Historical Archaeology, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 477-491
21. Kezie- Nwoha, Helen (2020), ‘Feminist Peace and Security in Africa,’ Oxfam, <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/feminist-peace-and-security-in-africa-621054/>
22. Okech, Awino (2016), ‘Statecraft and Pursuing Women’s Rights in Africa,’ African Women’s Development Fund, Primer One, <http://africlub.net/awdf/wp-content/uploads/Primers-One-Statecraft-Pursuing-womens-rights-in-Africa.pdf>
23. Tamale Sylvia (2005), ‘Alternative Leadership in Africa: Some Critical Feminist Reflections,’ in Feminist Politics, Activism and Vision (Toronto, Canada: Inanna Publications and Education Inc.)

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Where do we go from here?

Reimagining a Feminist Future

COVID-19 has forced countries around the continent and the globe to contend with the collective reflection of stark inequalities within and among countries, structural discrimination and inequality, authoritarianism and repression which directly contradict human rights and freedoms, the loss of credibility of democratic institutions and the manufacture of legitimacy, ecological disasters succeeding predatory extraction activities and asymmetrical international economic architectures which are harmful to local, indigenous populations.²⁴

Feminism has been critical in highlighting the linkages between patriarchy as the authority of male heads of households in the private sphere and authoritarianism in public life- political and economic. It has also illuminated the undervaluing of care in families and communities versus the construction of political and socio-economic systems that value capital over human lives.²⁵

Here, I propose that the unprecedented COVID- 19 crisis, is also an opportunity to re-imagine and re-create our societies towards feminist peace. Real progress will require the rejection of unequal hierarchical distributions of power and access to resources on one hand and the re-centring of care, human security and egalitarian economics. There has to be a collective recognition and acceptance of vulnerability and human interdependence and investment into building trust and strengthening mutuality among populations. For the African continent, it will require re-evaluating the colonially inherited governance systems and collectively reconstructing African society in line with the African reality.²⁶

Here, I propose that the unprecedented COVID- 19 crisis, is also an opportunity to re-imagine and re-create our societies towards feminist peace.

24. Moreno-Ruiz, Maria (2020)

25. Ibid

26. Miles, Angela (2004), Introduction in *Feminist Politics, Activism and Vision: Local and Global Challenges*, (New York: Zed Books)

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HOW WOMEN IN UGANDA ARE RESPONDING TO THE IMPACT OF COVID-19



Elizabeth Kisolo Nagudi

In early February 2020, Egypt became the first African country to officially report cases of COVID-19 (“A second COVID-19 case is confirmed in Africa”, 2020). In March, Rwanda imposed a lockdown, becoming the first African country to do so (“Several African Countries Confirm First Coronavirus Cases,” 2020). Although Uganda registered its first case of COVID-19 on 21 March, the Government had already instituted a lockdown on 20 March 2020 (Olum & Bongomin, 2020).

To contain the spread of the virus, wide-ranging measures have been adopted by states at local, national and global levels. These include the closure of airports to all but essential services and significant limitations of border movement; the closure of schools; suspension of activities likely to pull a crowd; and the introduction of standard operating procedures. Examples of the



latter have been the mandatory wearing of masks while in public; the reduction of passengers on public transport services; and public health campaigns urging citizens to wash their hands and/or to use sanitizers regularly (Aytekin, 2020).

As with other countries, the Government of Uganda introduced a slate of measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. These included suspending communal prayers in places of worship; banning the

movement of Ugandans to and from countries with high registered cases of COVID-19; suspending the operation of social activities such as discotheques, bars and clubs, and sporting events; and prohibiting the use of private cars. All non-essential shops were required to close leaving only agricultural shops/businesses to continue with their activities ("Full list of 34 Ugandan measures to contain COVID-19", 2020).

Adverse Consequences

Covid-19 has strained Uganda's health care system. It has exposed the loopholes in health care systems, the shortages of medical equipment, health personnel, and safety health tools ("Attacks on health care in the context of COVID-19", 2020). Women and children have been disproportionately adversely affected largely due to the additional obstacles confronted in accessing health care services.

The COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the Government have led to a rise in violence against women (VAW) and most notably domestic violence given the failure to take account of the gendered dimensions of lockdown policies (Wilberg, 2021). Gender-Based Violence increased during this period with a 24% rise in rape cases and a 30% increase in sexual violence experienced by teenage girls just 6 months into the first lockdown in 2020 (Susman, 2021). Due to the restrictions on movement, securing police protection has become more difficult especially for rural women and girls, as has accessing justice, exemplified by the story of Agnes, a woman who was subject to serious domestic violence in Amudat district, Northern Uganda (Senda, 2021).

Schools in Uganda have been closed since March 2020. Despite a planned phased reopening, schools were once again required to close in June 2021. As with VAW, the gendered dimensions

of the measure were not considered by the Government. The closure of schools has had disproportionate adverse consequences on the girl child. For example, there has been a sharp rise in pregnancy rates which stand at 22.5% among 10 to 24-years-olds forewarning a likelihood of increased school dropouts (Safioldin, 2021). Zombo district in Northern Uganda, reportedly had 6000 cases of pregnancy over a period of seventeen months among girls aged between 14- 17 years of age (URN, 2021).

The closure of schools has had disproportionate adverse consequences on the girl child. For example, there has been a sharp rise in pregnancy rates which stand at 22.5% among 10 to 24-years-olds forewarning a likelihood of increased school dropouts (Safioldin, 2021).

With the closure of schools and the loss of jobs, women's unpaid labour increased since more time was spent at home (Thorntorn, 2020). Before the

pandemic, women were estimated to spend an average of 3 hours involved in unpaid labor, while during the pandemic, women are estimated to be spending an equivalent of full-time employment carrying out unpaid labour activities (Thorntorn,2020). In addition to this, women have been laid off from their jobs which has been catastrophic for the dependents and worse for cases where the women earned a hand to mouth income (Lyster & Singo, 2020).

The restrictions on public transport hindered mobility making accessibility of workplaces impossible for many. This has left market traders with little option but to sleep in the marketplaces to ensure an income. The knock-on effect for women market traders has been especially harsh. In addition to confronting the risk of contracting malaria, experiencing uncomfortable sleeping conditions, and higher levels of personal insecurity, often, the women have had to use unhygienic shared toilets and bathing spaces undermining their personal dignity. To make matters worse, there was a decline in their customers due to the restrictions on the freedom of movement, adversely impacting their income flow (Asala,

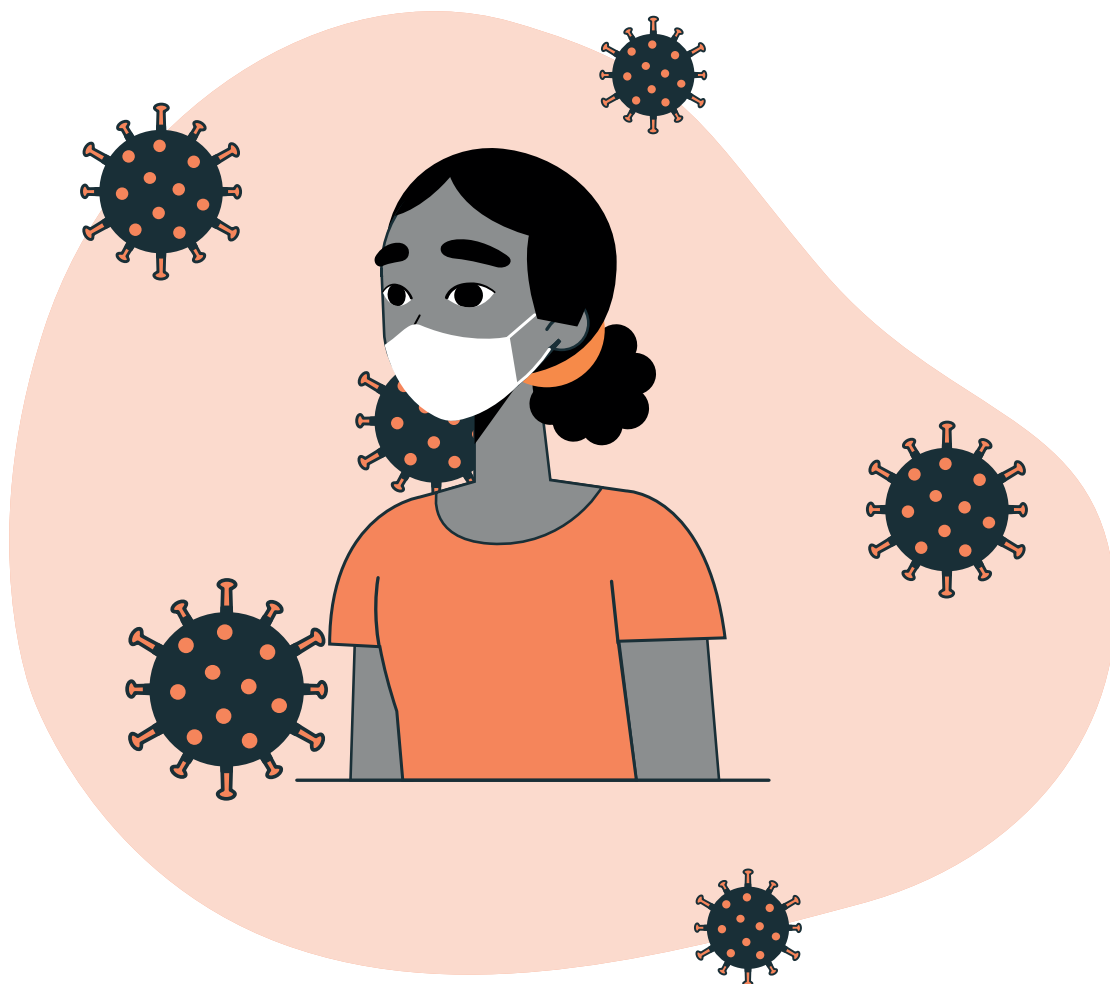
2021). Women market traders who have been able to commute daily have faced different challenges. Some have had to walk long distances that stretch to 20 km from their homes to the marketplaces in the morning and embark on a return journey in the evening, a distance they have to cover before the curfew time ("Feature: Ugandan women brave cold nights in food markets amid COVID-19 lockdown- Xinhua | English.news.cn", 2021).

Before the pandemic, women were estimated to spend an average of 3 hours involved in unpaid labor, while during the pandemic, women are estimated to be spending an equivalent of full-time employment carrying out unpaid labour activities (Thorntorn,2020).

Positive Outlook

New lifestyles have emerged challenging the old traditions. With the ban on public transportation and increased transport fares in Uganda, bicycle use has greatly increased, and more women are cycling to places of work (Moraz, 2020). The use of bicycles/bikes was unpopular among women in Uganda due to social norms (Jamer, 2017), but the narrative is changing with women welcoming bicycle riding as a means of transportation towards economic empowerment.

Women have flourished in the mask-making business following the government directive of wearing masks while in public places.



On the bright side, women have sought out various ways to combat the economic challenges that COVID-19 has had in Uganda. Women have flourished in the mask-making business following the government directive of wearing masks while in public places. These masks are made from the local cloth material known as Kitenge aligned with a cotton cloth and seamed using a sewing machine and are later hawked on the streets (“European Union project supports Kampala youths, women make masks to block COVID-19”, 2020). A street mask price ranges between UGX 1000- UGX 3000.

Women have played a pivotal role in the fight against COVID-19. They have tirelessly worked as doctors, nurses, caretakers, frontline workers, and community health workers. Particularly in Uganda, the political and institutional responsive teams have been headed by women such as Ruth Aceng who is the Minister of Health and has been at the frontline of the struggle against COVID-19. (“Why We Need Women’s Leadership in the COVID-19 Response? the Case of Kampala | Cities Alliance”, 2020). Women medical workers have been at the front of the fight against COVID-19 in Uganda. Locally made drugs to treat the virus have been developed and Covylce-1 is one of the local herbs that was developed by a team of 10 led by a woman; Dr. Alice Lamwaka

(Olukya, 2021). According to a study by the University of Dublin, women-led countries suffered the effects of COVID-19 six times less compared to men-led countries (Sirleaf, 2020). This has shown that representation matters and that women can ably be great leaders if given the same opportunities and enabling factors.

In some quarters, there have been gains for women in Uganda. However, this has been offset by significant setbacks with an increase in sexual and gender-based violence, rising levels of income insecurity and additional obstacles to accessing health facilities (Alupo, 2021) and justice mechanisms.

For economies to fully recover from the recess period that the pandemic has created, women have to be fully brought on board to pool a larger labor force. Championing women’s empowerment can potentially add \$12 trillion to the global GDP by 2025 (Woetzel & Madgavkar, 2015). Ensuring that more women occupy leadership positions is another focal area meriting attention. Uganda’s growth and development can be fully realized if women are empowered economically, politically and socially beyond the cultural norms that exclude women from occupying and participating in community growth and development activities.

COVID-19, a viral disease that spreads through cough droplets or contact with an infected person, has greatly affected the people of Uganda and women and girls in particular. The pandemic has slowed (and in some cases reversed) the progress that was geared towards gender parity. Despite initiatives by the Government to mitigate the adverse effects of the emergency measures adopted (for example, distributing mosquito nets to market vendors and launching a COVID 19 relief fund of UGX 100,000), more targeted efforts are needed to support women and girls to recover from the direct and indirect consequences of the pandemic. This will require the Government to apply a gender analysis in respect of all new and existing policies and law to address the deep inequalities in Uganda that have been exposed by the pandemic.

“Gender equality and women’s rights are essential to getting through this pandemic together. I urge governments to put women and girls at the centre of their efforts to recover from COVID-19. That starts with women as leaders, with equal representation and decision-making power.”

“Put women and girls at the center of efforts to recover from COVID-19”—Statement by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, ” 2020

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COVID PTSD

CPTSD



Saba Hamzah





I thought it was all over
the distances between us
the fear the fighting
the forbidden
the veils

the borders
the boundaries
the pain

but corona
brought it all back

the distances
the Lockdown
the masks
the isolation
the fear

a new war
Covid isn't the only enemy
trauma haunts fugitive women
and ignite the body and the mind

one lesson I learned from all the wars I escaped
there is always
always
always
a way to survive

THE INFLUENTIAL ROLE OF WOMEN AS THE GAME CHANGERS IN FEMINIST PEACE PROCESSES

The Case of Cameroon



Umenjoh Vania Andoumbeni

Peace is generally juxtaposed against war. Thus, for some, it simply denotes the absence of war. However, peace means different things to different people depending on their individual experiences and opportunities. For example, peace can also be defined as an individual's ability to meet his or her needs or a nation's ability to meet the needs of her citizens without discrimination or prejudice.

At the United Nations level, peace is treated as more than just the absence of war (United Nations News 2014). As former UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki-Moon stated, "peace means access to health, education and essential services especially for girls and women giving

every young woman and man the chance to live as they choose; and developing sustainably and developing the planet biodiversity” (United Nations Secretary-General 2014). While no universal definition exists, there is an assumption that gender equality is core to peace and that everyone has an equal share in shaping a peaceful future. Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (2017) confirms that “sustainable and feminist peace enables effective conflict prevention, disarmament and providing effective conditions to women’s Empowerment”.

In this comment, I reflect on the lived experiences of women and girls in Cameroon and how some of the obstacles that deprive them of fully participating in the shaping of a peaceful future for Cameroon might be overcome. Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (CHRDA), talking about the Anglophone crisis and human rights emphasises that “the existence of armed conflicts in Cameroon and beyond pose a physical and psychological threat to women. This is because they become more vulnerable during conflict” (CHRDA, 2021).



Consequences of civil war for women and girls

Since 2016, an armed conflict has been fought in the southern regions of Cameroon. More commonly referred to as the Anglophone Crisis, the conflict has resulted in the death of thousands and the displacement of over half a million people. Many of those forcibly displaced have lost their source of livelihood and are now living in other towns including Douala, Yaounde and Baffousam. For women and girls, the hardships encountered as a result of conflict and displacement typically differ from men and boys by their sex and gender and are often magnified. For example, menstruation can make the flight from war zones even more difficult as do care responsibilities for children or older people. An escalation in sexual and gender-based violence is a common feature of forced displacement and the available evidence indicates that Cameroon is no exception. Such violence can take different forms from domestic violence to being trafficked by strangers.

For those who have been widowed and/or find themselves to be ‘temporary’ heads of households, providing for the family’s basic well-being places additional burdens on them, made even more arduous by the fact of displacement. The sudden loss of income that comes with forced displacement has led to greater levels of poverty among women and girls in Cameroon exacerbating what was already a feminised problem.

In this comment, I reflect on the lived experiences of women and girls in Cameroon and how some of the obstacles that deprive them of fully participating in the shaping of a peaceful future for Cameroon might be overcome.

Due to the fighting, the roads linking rural and urban areas are oftentimes inaccessible and always insecure leading to food insecurity and a rise in the cost of living. In rural areas, most women who do have an income work in the informal sector and thus have found themselves to be in a precarious position. For many women and girls prostitution has become the only means of survival.

The heightened level of insecurity in the North West and South West Regions has seriously hampered the provision of education. School closures, especially in the villages, have stripped many of the most deprived children of their opportunity for education. In particular, girls have been disproportionately affected and there has been a rise in the number of teenage pregnancies. The destruction of roads linking villages and

towns has made access to basic health care facilities difficult at best. Women and girls have been prevented from securing reproductive and maternal healthcare resulting in disproportionate adverse consequences to their physical and mental health.

Everyday Discrimination in Cameroon

The experiences of women and girls in the conflict zones differ markedly from those who live in areas not blighted by war. However, the absence of war does not necessarily mean people are 'at peace' and nor that rights are respected and protected. Though war may be absent, the daily reality for a large proportion of the people of Cameroon involves living in conditions of poverty, neglect, exploitation, abuse, discrimination and marginalisation. For women and girls, these axes of oppression are typically exacerbated by their sex and gender.

Many married women are victims of domestic violence which can take the form of verbal, sexual, physical and economic abuse or a combination thereof. Oftentimes women are barred by spouses from taking on paid



employment outside the 'home' but instead are forced to spend their time exclusively on care responsibilities and domestic 'chores'. It is also not uncommon for girls to be forced into early marriage only to be exploited and abused by their husbands. To protect their daughters from early marriage, mothers typically hide from fathers the fact that a daughter has begun to menstruate. Social practices such as early marriage deprive the girl child of her right to education, her autonomy, the prospect of living a full and independent life and result in serious physical and mental health problems especially when complications are arising from teenage

pregnancy. Likewise, serious physical and mental health consequences can result from female genital mutilation which remains a common practice among many communities in Cameroon.

More generally, the lack of employment opportunities coupled with endemic levels of bribery and corruption in the country is leaving the youth with little hope for building a meaningful peaceful future at home. This reality is

the primary reason for the decision on the part of men to migrate to America, Europe and Arab countries like Dubai in search of greener pastures and to support their families. Some travel through illegal means: the journeys are always treacherous and the prospect of dying in the desert is very real. For the women and girls who are 'left behind,' the absence of men can make daily life even more challenging and give rise to different insecurities.

Feminist Peace Processes

Conflict Prevention and Equality

Feminists have long struggled to secure equality and to campaign on ending all forms of violence including war. As elaborated by Helen Kezie-Nwoha, "feminist peace is related to three perspectives; peace as the absence of every type of structural violence; peace and security for all, and peace premised on the universal integration of a gender perspective as well as the equal participation at all levels and in all peace building process"(African Feminism 2018). While the inclusion of women into peace processes may "add value to the outcome", as Kezie-Nwoha emphasises, women have the right to participate in public life on an equal basis with men.(African Feminism 2018).

Moussi talking about the Anglophone crisis says "while women have been

The heightened level of insecurity in the North West and South West Regions has seriously hampered the provision of education. School closures, especially in the villages, have stripped many of the most deprived children of their opportunity for education.

victims in the Anglophone crisis, they have however exercise agency. Escaping from the victimhood cloak that has often been used to blanket women in conflict, the women in the affected regions have

claimed their agency by being advocates of peace as well as being activists. They have mobilised themselves through various NGOs and taskforce to bring International and local attention to the conflict and they continue to advocate for the end of this conflict. Examples include the South West and North West Women Task Force (SNWOT) and Women for a Change Cameroon (WFAC)” (Moussi, 2021).

The important role of women in the peace building process is reaffirmed by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. The resolution specifically addresses how women and girls are disproportionately impacted by violence and war and recognize the critical role that women can and already do play in peacebuilding efforts. The United States Institute of Peace (2021) notes how resolution 1325, recognises that peace and security efforts are more



sustainable when women are equal partners in the prevention of violent conflict, and the delivery of relief and recovery efforts and the forging of lasting peace. Moreover, resolution 1325, urges all actors to increase the participation of women and additionally incorporate a gender perspective in all UN peace and security efforts. Parties engaged in conflict must take special measures to protect women and girls from all forms of gender-based violence especially rape and other forms of sexual violence that are particularly widespread during times of violent conflict.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom [WILPF] which has worked for over a century to secure equality and peace has emphasised the need for states to listen to local women and to learn from them to understand the root cause of conflict, enable space for feminist change and adopt necessary policies. WILPF has also championed the need to ensure the equal participation of women in all decision-making arguing that local women peace activists and women human rights defenders can provide important input, analysis and information and be connected so that actions are responsive to diverse needs, rights and requirements of the people.

Women, including in Cameroon, have always been sidelined in peacebuilding processes. The involvement of women in feminist peace processes will ensure sustainability in peacebuilding

and development. To ensure gender equality in Cameroon, children should be socialised from childhood to be gender-sensitive both at home, in school and community. Proper socialisation will dismantle gender stereotypes from their roots. Moreover, both men and women should be allowed to be assertive. Both men and women should be considered as an integral part of the decision making process both at family and community levels and as agents of development. Parents should consider both boys and girls as equal members of the family without any discrimination. The government should consider women political representation as a vital part of the peace and development process. The customary law should work in alignment with the statutory law since the two do not often agree when it comes to the rights of women and gender equality in Cameroon. The inclusion of women in all decision-making processes is vital. As a first step, women in Cameroon must be fully included in all aspects of decision-making to ensure that their rights are fully protected and to effect meaningful change. For example, all forms of gender-based violence such as child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), son preferences, inheritance rights, land ownership in favour of men/ boys need to be dismantled since each is rooted in gender-based discrimination. Every gender needs to be at peace with themselves and with their environment as well as being sure of their security.

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WHAT DOES FEMINIST AND PEACEFUL COVID-19 RECOVERY MEAN IN UGANDA?

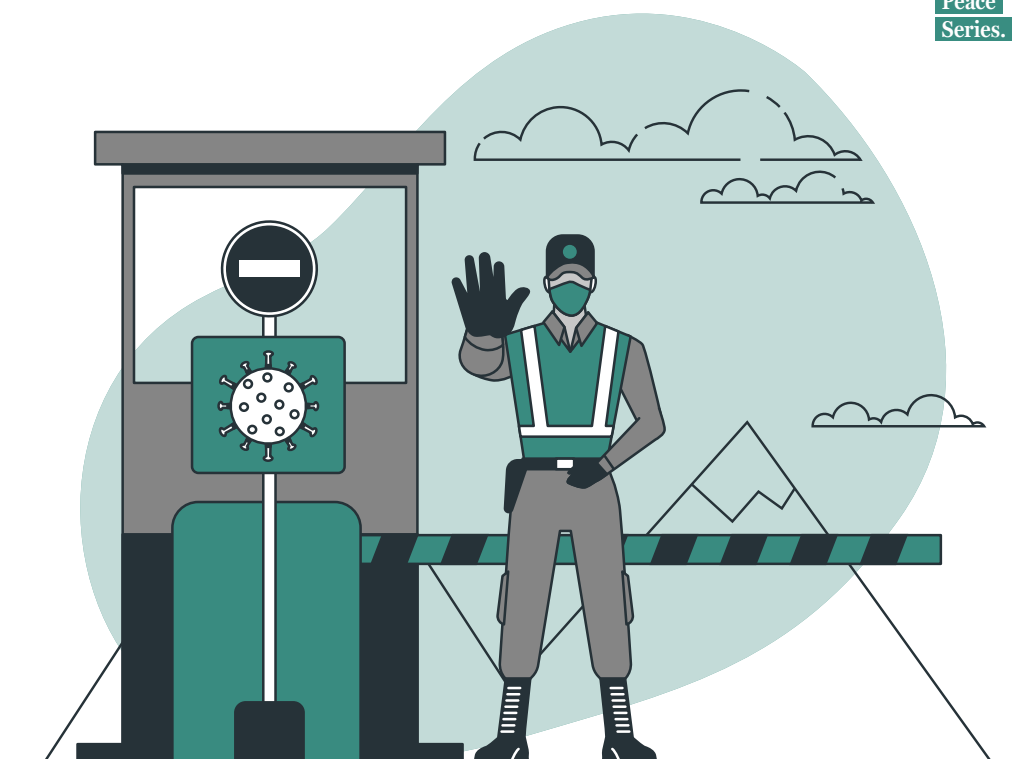


Sharon Eryenyu

On March 27, 2020, Uganda registered its first case of COVID-19 and by 31st July 2021 had recorded 84,959 cases and 2,710 deaths ²⁷. Uganda has had three-phased lockdowns with the most recent being a 42-day lockdown to curb the spread of the COVID-19 Delta variant. This has been a challenging period for many Ugandans who have experienced heightened

This article discusses the current situation in Uganda and the measures that must be introduced to ensure full COVID-19 recovery moving forward.

27. www.health.go.ug



levels of economic and personal insecurity. However, women and girls, the elderly, the homeless, those with disabilities and LGBTI+ persons have been disproportionately adversely affected and made more vulnerable by their marginalisation in decision-making processes and through the silencing of their voices. The Government has continued to militarise the pandemic response by restricting personal freedoms and introducing heavy-handed policing during lockdowns thereby reducing community interaction, closing businesses and maintaining curfews. This has caused fear, anxiety and increased levels of stress and trauma among the population.

This article discusses the current situation in Uganda and the measures that must be introduced to ensure full COVID-19 recovery moving forward.

The Government has continued to militarise the pandemic response by restricting personal freedoms and introducing heavy-handed policing during lockdowns thereby reducing community interaction, closing businesses and maintaining curfews.

Women as first responders to COVID-19

At the community level, women are already vital leaders in pandemic response: they are caring for people who become sick, ensuring food for their families, organising their communities and more. Many are trusted long-time activists who understand deeply and specifically the needs of their communities. They are known locally as reliable sources of support and information. What is sorely lacking is their inclusion in decision-making around the pandemic exemplified by their exclusion from COVID-19 Task Forces and planning committees. One way to ensure that women are given leadership roles is to guarantee that all COVID-19 Task Forces and Committees include at least 50 per cent of women. This must include women in all their diversities from the grassroots, civil society, and those who are at the forefront of the COVID-19 response. We must ensure that these women have the space to offer their expertise to shape policy responses.

With more cases being reported, there has been a notable increase in the workload for the COVID 19 response task force in the districts. In particular, the burden on women peace mediators operating at the district level has risen sharply due to greater incidents of conflict and the additional challenges presented by working within a global

pandemic. The Women's International Peace Centre (The Peace Centre) also recognises that women and girls who are community volunteers, home-based caregivers and peacebuilders are making critical contributions to alleviating the effects of COVID19 on local populations whilst maintaining personal protection. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the Peace Centre has supported the personal wellbeing of women peace mediators and community efforts in the host and refugee communities of Yumbe, Adjumani and Kotido districts. The Peace Mediators were given sanitary kits including washing soap, sanitary pads, facemasks and sanitisers. This enabled them to continue their work raising awareness on COVID 19 and documenting conflict incidences in their communities. Long before the pandemic, grassroots feminists worldwide have grappled with the need to meet urgent needs while simultaneously working towards long-term, systemic solutions. Learning from these approaches, policymakers can implement emergency relief efforts, whether distributing food or providing health information, while setting the stage for long-term recovery. This means continually reasserting the need for a shift in the values driving our policies, amplifying feminist approaches of collective work and community care.²⁸

28. Africa: Q&A - Covid-19 Has Pushed Women Peacebuilders From Key Leadership Roles - [allAfrica.com](https://www.allAfrica.com)



Violence against women and girls

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, emerging data and reports from those on the front lines have shown that all types of violence against women and girls have intensified across the globe. Before the pandemic, it was estimated that one in three women will experience violence during their lifetimes. Globally, 18% of ever-partnered women and girls aged

15–49 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of a current or previous partner in the previous 12 months.²⁹ Lockdown measures have resulted in a surge in violence against women (VAW) around the world with early data suggesting that reported cases have risen upwards of 25% in countries with reporting systems in place.³⁰

29. Laura Turquet and Sandrine Koissy-Kpein (2020) COVID-19: Emerging gender data and why it matters. <https://data.unwomen.org/resources/COVID-19-emerging-gender-data-and-why-it-matters#vaw>

30. United Nations (2020) POLICY BRIEF: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN. Page 17-18. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-the-impact-of-COVID-19-onwomen-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1406>

While gender-based violence (GBV) has increased at an alarming rate during the pandemic, its disproportionate impact on specific communities and groups of people follow along familiar lines, reflecting existing societal inequalities.

According to the 2020 Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Report, 17,664 cases of domestic violence were reported to the authorities compared with 13,693 in 2019, representing a 29% increase. 418 murders involving domestic violence were registered in 2020 compared to 360 cases in 2019, a 16.1% increase.³¹ This increase is attributed to the lockdown period aimed at curbing the spread of the virus. 8.2% of the crimes reported in 2020 were 'sex-related crimes' (16,144 cases), an increase of 3.8% compared with the previous year.

Survivors of GBV have experienced limited access to legal protection services as most civil hearings and case-file reception at courts remain suspended; there are significant delays in issuing court orders, and the vast majority of legal aid centres are closed. To compound matters, there is limited access to helplines for girls and women.

The Ugandan authorities must ensure that women and girls are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in decision-making on all aspects of program/policy design and implementation, to ensure that GBV prevention, response, and coordination approaches can be carried out in a way that is context-specific, sustainable, and adapted to the gendered dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic.³² Short and long-term Sexual and GBV (SGBV) services should be prioritized and categorized as life-saving due to the negative and often life-threatening impacts of SGBV on individuals, their families, social cohesion and economic stability. The Government should designate domestic violence shelters as essential services and increase resources to all providers including civil society groups on the front line of response and ensure continuity of essential services such as access to a safe birth, antenatal and postnatal care and immunization programmes. They must also ensure continued access to sexual and reproductive health services, women's access to family planning, child and adolescent health services and other critical services.³³

31. ANNUAL-CRIME-REPORT-2020-1.pdf (independent.co.ug)

32. GBV_and_COVID_Policy_Brief_FINAL.pdf (reliefweb.int)

33. 39878-doc-final-final-policy_paper-_gbv_in_africa_during_covid-19_pandemic.pdf (au.int)

Education

School closures intensify gender inequalities, especially for the poorest girls and adolescents who face a greater risk of early and forced marriage, sexual abuse and unintended pregnancy during emergencies.³⁴ Moreover, in areas where social norms lead to greater disparities between girls and boys in enrolment and retention in school, temporary disruption as a result of a crisis such as COVID-19 can lead to permanent removal from school. Families being unable to pay school fees resulting from loss of income during the crisis, negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage, or the loss of educational infrastructures such as girls' peer networks and teachers are prominent concerns.³⁵ The Government, NGOs and communities have been exploring different methods to try and help children with their learning while they are at home such as through printed learning packs and radio and TV programmes. These have had some limited impact, although experience so far shows that there are a lot of gaps and

challenges. Most concerning is that the poorest and most vulnerable children are being left behind. Many of these children do not have access to electricity excluding them from study materials broadcast on TVs. Still, others do not have access to the internet let alone digital devices such as smartphones. In June 2020, the Government announced that radios would be distributed for free to aid learning during the COVID-19 period. At least 10 million radio sets and 137,466 solar-powered television sets³⁶ were planned for distribution amongst households in villages. However, Parliament's Budget Committee declined to approve the supplementary budget.³⁷ This left many young students lagging in their studies while those in the cities who can afford an online education continued with their studies. All young people must have the resources, tools and social support to remain engaged in learning during school closures and re-enter the education system once the crisis is over.

34. 10 lessons from the COVID-19 frontline for a more gender-equal world | World Economic Forum (weforum.org)

35. CARE and the International Rescue Committee. Global Rapid Gender Analysis for COVID-19. March 2020. https://www.careinternational.org/files/files/Global_RGA_COVID_RDM_3_31_20_FINAL.pdf

36. Cabinet rejects dead year, opts to buy 10m radio sets - Daily Monitor

37. <https://www.independent.co.ug/budget-committee-rejects-ugx-336bn-radio-procurement-deal/>

Moreover, in areas where social norms lead to greater disparities between girls and boys in enrolment and retention in school, temporary disruption as a result of a crisis such as COVID-19 can lead to permanent removal from school.



Transitional Justice

Throughout the pandemic, the Ugandan Government has channelled public funds on militarizing its response to the pandemic rather than protecting the people. The State's use of warlike language to describe its response to the pandemic is problematic. It indicates that as a nation we think the best way to handle the situation is to cause fear and panic among the citizens. With a delicate history of conflict ³⁸, very little has been done to respond to victims and survivors' needs during the pandemic. A large proportion of people in Northern Uganda have only recently gone through atrocious conflict-related human rights violations. The COVID19 containment measures, enforced with a troubling degree of brutality by armed security officers, has re-traumatized very many. The Government of Uganda has been reluctant to deliver redress to victims for rights violations perpetrated during the armed conflict. Constant pressure and advocacy by victims and civil society organisations eventually resulted in the adoption of the National Transitional Justice policy by the Government. However, with resources being diverted to address the pandemic, there is a real risk that the policy will be abandoned leaving victims to wait even longer for reparations and accountability measures envisaged under the Transitional Justice policy.

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Re-traumatization and other mental health issues have been raised as an impact of Uganda's militarized public health response to COVID19. The Government must work to address this, both in the short and long term by creating an open, inclusive and transparent process to shape their efforts at mobilising support to address the pandemic produces. This process needs to move beyond just including 'experts' but also include groups that have been thus far been marginalized during the conflict recovery process. Although there is nothing new about these longstanding patterns of injustice and discrimination, the current situation has amplified inequalities and made even more clear how vulnerable these already marginalized communities are. As such, any pandemic recovery plan must take these disparities into account.

38. Uganda has experienced political instability over the past 50 years with armed conflict and insurgencies in West Nile, Teso, Luwero/Central, Acholi, Lango, South Western and Karamoja regions characterized by large-scale human rights violations and abuses.

Economic recovery

The effects of the pandemic have also spilt over to the economy. The closure of national borders and lockdown measures has paralyzed economic activities with thousands of people losing their jobs and livelihoods due to restricted movement and reduced access to markets. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected Uganda's economy with factories, hotels, shops and offices closed due to the lockdown. This has heavily impacted on daily, weekly and monthly wages of both the formal and informal household workers who are unable to engage in any productive trade due to the closure of markets and restrictions on public transport.³⁹

The World Bank provided \$300 million in support to help mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic and protect poor and vulnerable populations. The financial support is part of a larger package of support to Uganda's National COVID-19 pandemic response and was coordinated with other interventions in the country, including in health, water and sanitation, agriculture, environment, private sector development and job creation.⁴⁰ In early July 2021, the Government distributed COVID-19 relief money of UGX.100,000 to support vulnerable citizens affected by the second lockdown. Beneficiaries included slum dwellers, food vendors, waiters, club bouncers, restaurant workers, musicians, comedians, taxi



39. The Economic Impact of the Lockdown Due to COVID-19 Pandemic on Low Income Households of the Five Divisions of Kampala District in Uganda (scirp.org)

40. Factsheet: Uganda COVID-19 Crisis Response and Recovery Budget Support (worldbank.org)

drivers, single mothers, teachers and support staff in private schools as well as those in government schools who are not on the payroll. By 22nd July, 413,504 beneficiaries in Kampala and Gulu ⁴¹ had received the cash. However, this initiative has been wrought with problems. For example, some people have received the payment twice while others have received nothing. Moreover, the approach adopted to identify beneficiaries has been criticised for being discriminatory. Apart from food, the cash relief did not consider other costs of daily living such as water, electricity, medical care, and other necessities leaving people to find other means of earning a living.

Displaced people, particularly women and people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, will struggle to find new ways of securing income or accessing resources for themselves and their families. This has the potential to increase the incidence of coping strategies such as transactional sex. ⁴² Some women and girls engage in transactional sex to make money during times of crisis when opportunities to achieve independent economic stability are reduced. Research also shows that humanitarian aid workers ⁴³ and peacekeepers are the perpetrators of sexual abuse and exploitation in times of crisis.

The COVID-19 outbreak has also exacerbated the gendered impacts of the crisis by increasing women's economic and social insecurity, unpaid care work, and domestic violence while cutting women off from social and institutional support. Increased unpaid care work reinforces existing gender inequality. Disparities in the gendered division of unpaid care work result from deeply rooted inequalities based on factors such as income, education, age, race, ethnicity and residence. Women and girls living in low-income countries, in rural areas, and with low education and income tend to provide a disproportionate share of unpaid care work. ⁴⁴ (ILO 2018).

Ugandan "growth" over the last thirty years has been accompanied by pervasive unemployment, whilst wealth

Apart from food, the cash relief did not consider other costs of daily living such as water, electricity, medical care, and other necessities leaving people to find other means of earning a living.

41. 410,000 beneficiaries have already received Covid relief cash - Nabbanja (observer.ug)

42. Full article: Transactional sex in the wake of COVID-19: sexual and reproductive health and rights of the forcibly displaced (tandfonline.com)

43. The New Humanitarian | More than 50 women accuse aid workers of sex abuse in Congo Ebola crisis

44. ILO. 2018. Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work. Geneva: ILO.

and inequality gaps are now at their highest levels. As COVID-19 continues to spread across the country, the absence of social safety nets needed by women due to their greater fiscal precarity in the face of economic shocks has exposed the failures of a development trajectory currently prioritising productivity for growth over the wellbeing of Ugandans. Indeed COVID-19 has made evident what feminists have long emphasised: that the profits made in economies and markets are subsidised by women's unpaid care and domestic work—an essential service

that even the current pandemic has failed to acknowledge and address in policy.⁴⁵

Ugandan “growth” over the last thirty years has been accompanied by pervasive unemployment, whilst wealth and inequality gaps are now at their highest levels.

Health Care

Many governments in Africa took measures to address the spread of COVID-19 including diverting healthcare resources to care for those with the disease. However, these measures have seriously disrupted the healthcare service delivery systems in other vital areas. With the diversion of personnel and resources away from priority diseases, patients with HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, cancer, hypertension, hepatitis B, epilepsy, sickle cell, as well as mental health, maternal or childhood conditions, faced an increased risk of complications and death. Barriers to accessing healthcare are further magnified by transport restrictions, curfew, and the fear of

contracting the virus from healthcare settings. In addition, the situation has been exacerbated by existing healthcare system challenges including inadequate human resources, financial, infrastructural, supply chain and logistical challenges⁴⁶.

The pandemic has adverse effects on many women and girls who have limited access to healthcare services due to the unequal allocation of resources and priorities. Women and girls still do not have their full-body autonomy and are unable to make informed sexual, reproductive, and healthcare decisions. In July 2020, 2,372 teenage

45. African Feminism: Post-COVID-19 Economic Recovery Statement – Meridians (smith.edu)

46. Easing COVID-19 impact on key health services - Uganda | ReliefWeb

With women lacking access to safe and legal abortions, many of them turn to unsafe abortion practices, such as self-induced abortions.



pregnancies were reported in 5 districts of Kitgum, Ngora, Kyegegwa, Kasese and Lyantonde alone.⁴⁷ These young women and girls suffer debilitating consequences of pregnancy such as death from pregnancy- and childbirth-related complications because abortion in Uganda is illegal unless performed by a licensed medical doctor who, based on a clinical assessment and expert opinion, believes that pregnancy places the woman's life at risk. With women lacking access to safe and legal abortions, many of them turn to unsafe abortion practices, such as self-induced abortions. Unequal gender norms also contribute to women's vulnerability to sexual violence HIV and prevent them from seeking HIV testing, counselling, and treatment, as well as disclosing their HIV status.⁴⁸ Women's sexual and reproductive health choices are dominated by socio-cultural expectations and impacted by women's subordinate status in society.

Access to healthcare has been severely diminished by the lack of income to buy vital medicines and seek healthcare. As COVID cases surge in the country, there has been a growing concern over the exploitation of patients by private hospitals accused of demanding payment upfront and hiking fees. Hospitals across the country continue to report difficulties

in finding bottled oxygen, and some are running out of space for COVID-19 patients. Many Ugandans do not trust government hospitals, citing the decay they find there as well as the occasional lack of basic supplies.⁴⁹

The Government needs to work smarter to support the health response by reducing the cost of necessary medical materials and equipment to prevent, manage and treat COVID-19. In addition, critical utility services must be maintained and the most vulnerable more effectively protected by taking into account the poverty impact of the crisis. At least 1.07 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine have been administered, representing about 5 per cent of the targeted people.⁵⁰, according to statistics from the Ministry of Health.⁵¹ The Government must enhance and more expeditiously roll out its vaccination programme including through community outreach activities. Messages on the vaccination against COVID-19 including the benefits and side effects of the vaccination must be translated into local languages and disseminated on all platforms, discussions on local community media, and mainstream radio and television stations.

47. Teenage pregnancy in Uganda during COVID19 times | by Wanawake kwanza | Medium

48. Improving Health For Women And Girls | U.S. Agency for International Development (usaid.gov)

49. As virus surges in Uganda, hospitals accused of profiteering - ABC News (go.com)

50. Of the targeted 21.9 million people, 878,890 have received the first dose of AstraZeneca and another 201,053 are fully vaccinated

51. 5 % of targeted population vaccinated against Covid-19 - Daily Monitor

Conclusion

The cascading effects of the COVID-19 crisis are yet to be fully uncovered and appreciated. The crisis provides a critical window of opportunity to build more effective, inclusive and resilient systems. Women and girls, especially those with intersectional characteristics, are particularly disadvantaged during situations of instability and upheaval due to the structures of oppression, power relations and social norms that prevent them from accessing basic services, including healthcare and education, and participating in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Consequently, they face higher risks of falling into poverty, dropping out of schools, and experiencing hunger and malnutrition.⁵² Feminist movements are not new to the challenge of multiple crises. Solutions have long been articulated and fought for by feminist movements in research, advocacy,

practice and mobilisations locally and globally. Those whose lives and livelihoods are already affected should be in the driving seat of policymaking.⁵³

Those whose lives and livelihoods are already affected should be in the driving seat of policymaking.⁵³

To this end, governments need to design comprehensive systems from a gender and intersectional perspective. These systems should include policies that provide universal, good-quality public services and resources and infrastructures to meet the different care needs of the population.

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