

---

# UGANDA: WOMEN, PEACE, SECURITY AND THE PANDEMIC

## MEDIATION TO ADDRESS TENSIONS DURING COVID-19

**Diana Oroma,**

Project Officer, Women's International Peace Centre, Uganda

---

**On the fateful night when our government announced complete lockdown, I went into panic mode imagining I would be stuck in the capital city Kampala, over 360km from my family, for an unknown amount of time.**

I managed to board the only bus that travelled that night, setting off just seconds before the closure of the bus park. Working from home, with the children competing for attention, dealing with poor internet networks while also learning new technologies, became a new challenge.

I was also concerned about the wellbeing of our partners, the women peace mediators in Yumbe, Adjumani, and Kotido who are always talking to others, walking around their communities and refugee settlements documenting conflict incidences and meeting with the leaders to report cases and running follow up until they are resolved. I called them and they shared painful experiences of the lockdown. At the family level, women were locked down with their abusers and domestic violence increased. In Kotido, armed cattle raids increased with over 1000 animals stolen. Yumbe and Adjumani near South Sudan had a stricter lockdown with refugees entering through porous borders.

Appreciative of the fact that peace building is a continuous process that should not be suspended, and deeply concerned for the health and safety of our partners, I asked myself,

**“We may not have a budget to protect the women from COVID-19 but who are we working for? What would we do if one of them succumbed to it?”**



This drove us to develop and implement a COVID-19 response plan. With support from district leaders, we were able to reach out to 160 women peace mediators with soap, sanitary pads, masks, and safety information. We thereafter participated in the COVID-19 response taskforce at district level to ensure women's perspectives were considered in decision-making. Tensions increased as restrictions were enforced and a violent conflict broke out. We were able to mediate an ethnic conflict between the Nuer and Dinka in Maaji III refugee settlement, along with the women peace mediators and district leaders. In Kotido, we had to reduce the size of our meetings with local leaders and peace mediators because a physical gathering was inevitable.

My greatest lessons were that flexibility and adaptability are key in difficult situations and that peace will not wait.