



Sustaining Women's leadership



WOMEN'S RESILIENCE

IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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WOMEN'S RESILIENCE IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

INVAWG Uganda Biannual reporting: October 2020-March 2021.
Feminist Response to Exclusion and Gender Violence (FeRe)



CONTEXT



Sustaining Women's leadership

Despite being the majority, women and girls do not enjoy equal social, economic and political status. Although Chapter 4 of Uganda's Constitution provides non-discrimination protections based on sex and gender, there still exists social, economic, political and legal discrimination against women and girls. Documenting women's stories of resilience is a project of the International Network to end Violence against Women and Girls (INVAWG) in partnership with the Mentoring and Empowerment Programme for Young Women (MEMPROW) a feminist organisation that creates space for building the capacity of girls and young women for voice and feminist leadership.

During these unusual times resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, INVAWG responded to the state of violence against women, including sexual minorities in Uganda, are experiencing. With violence exacerbated by restrictions of the lockdowns and curfews, one of the project aims to explore and understand the mental, emotional and economic challenges that women and girls face both personally and as a collective.

STILL HERE: SURVIVING THE PANDEMIC ON THE MARGINS

We have just crossed into the second year of the pandemic. One year since a lot in our lives changed in ways we could never have imagined, an overly stated fact. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected different people differently, building on the already existing situation within which people were living or surviving. For some, it was merely a pause that even with restrictive measures like curfews and lockdowns, with or without hand sanitizer and masks, there were jobs to go back to and children to care for.

Many lost their jobs, and with movement restrictions, millions of women and girls found themselves sheltering in the same spaces with their abusers. School closures particularly brought more challenges for women and girls. For many women with children, the care work more than doubled, adding homeschooling for those who could afford it. School is, for millions of girls, a place where they can be shielded from abuse that is all too often common at home and in communities. Without school, the statistics on abuse and teenage pregnancy show that our communities do not give young women safety. For those who stayed working, the income was not coming in as before and yet they had to put in extra work within the few hours given the curfew and transport restrictions. Some women have lost their jobs and continue to struggle as social safety nets are all dried in the face of the pandemic induced economic crisis. There are those women who defied the measures because that was the only way to survive.

In Uganda, the Ministry of Health daily updates showed the total tests done, the new cases, the number of recoveries, and those who had died. These categories did not account for the Ugandans for whom getting a test done was the last thing on their minds or those who were struggling in homes with many other conditions.

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The impact of the pandemic is beyond the direct effect on our bodies and health systems. The Ministry did not account for the Ugandans whose daily update was on whether they would have food that day because of the effects of the pandemic. While so much effort was seemingly put into dealing with the sick, I think about Audre Lorde urging us to pay attention to the living.

***"We must learn to count the living with that same particular attention with which we number the dead."* – Audre Lorde.**

And this is what these stories do.

They pay particular attention to how women have navigated, survived, invented community and sustained it in the absence of government policies to care for them. These stories went further than the headlines of how many teenage girls have gotten pregnant in the lockdown; they went beyond the statistics of women left out of work, having to take care of their families; they went beyond the cries of the tourism industry losing billions and looked at the people who need the tourism to have food at the end of the day. These stories look into the living, and how they are attending to their survival. And what they need if they are to continue to live. A sex worker trying to make money with a curfew in place. A teenager dealing with sexual abuse with no family support and find a temporary shelter. A teen mother trying to stay in school against all odds. A brewer turning to farming now that social gatherings were banned. A woman with a disability finding their social support system. A refugee tailor selling masks to stay afloat. A grandmother missing and worrying for her grandchildren during a temporary separation. A trans man living with HIV in a pandemic under an already discriminating healthcare system. These stories are presented with such generosity and care, of people doing the active work of keeping themselves and their communities alive. It answers June Jordan's question, "and what shall we do, we who did not die?"

We continue to do the often-unglamorous work of maintaining life.

In her 1969 Maintenance Manifesto, artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles encourages us to consider,

"what is the relationship between maintenance and freedom?" These stories mirror this question. While we continue to work towards a world where young girls do not have to deal with sexual violence, what happens to those who have dealt with it is part of the maintenance work we do. While we advocate for a world where queer people are not easy targets for harassment, meeting their immediate material needs is the maintenance work we have to do. While we resist capitalism, we form communities like the various saving groups that some of these women are a part of to help us survive it. Organizing like this is maintenance work, and like a lot of the change we desire, seems to be untethered to 'big' government policy. It is the work of people seeing themselves through.

I cannot help but wonder how much more possible their lives would be, how much more possible all our lives would be if we were not constantly working against the state directives and policies that have directly or otherwise caused such unfreedom and death. Maybe Judith would not be struggling to pay the rent for her business. Maybe Naome would not find using public transportation such a complication because of a disability. Maybe Teopista and Akankwasa would have access to clean running water and proper shelter for their families. Maybe Specioza would have access to quality public healthcare. Awekonimungu and Adiru would have access to basic education materials and a life free of violence. If we are not hoping for basic human rights, what dreams could we have? What lives could we lead? It is a shame that these are questions these women do not have the chance to luxuriate in. And yet, and yet, theirs are not stories of despair.

These stories are inspiring because they look squarely at the conditions of this life and without asking for pity or claiming some form of heroism, say, this is how we have survived. Nothing sums it up more aptly than June Jordan's words, "I realized that regardless of the tragedy, regardless of the grief, regardless of the monstrous challenge, Some of Us Have Not Died." Praise be. These stories are the testimony.



Methodology

The project used storytelling to document women's realities in their diverse identities amidst the Coronavirus pandemic in Uganda.

The storytelling lead, a journalist was recruited and worked with writers and photographers to interview ten women in Kampala, Wakiso, Busia and Kisoro districts between October and December 2020. The storytelling visibilises women and girls' lives and how the pandemic has shaped them in the last one year.

Following a feminist story collection approach, writers sought diverse women's experiences, highlighted the existing systems of oppression women navigate even before the pandemic and how restrictions have made it harder for them to navigate, and other innovative approaches deployed to cope with the pandemic times. The documentation included spotlighting women's resilience, including those who belong to the sexual minorities' community, women with disability, sex workers, urban refugees, and grassroots market women, amplifying their creative responses and organizing during the COVID 19 pandemic. The writers and photographer sought permission from the women interviewed, where women wanted to tell their stories anonymously, anonymity was granted. Therefore, you will find some stories with 'name withheld' and photographs hiding the interviewees' faces.

The documentation took the form of photography and written stories. Despite the reality of the pandemic, writers took great care to wear protective masks as they interacted face to face with women to collect their stories. A total of 10 written format stories have been produced in the first series, predominantly from Kampala and surrounding areas, Kisoro and Busia.

The stories explored where the pandemic closures found these women at, what their lives were like before, what happened in the first weeks of country lockdowns and as the restrictions ease and a new phase of living with the virus is on, how they are dealing with expectations in the 'new normal'. The stories are written in a profile format look into existing systems, structures and policies, social, economic, and political, that created a difference as the women and the population brave the pandemic's social and economic effects. Some of the queries answered by these stories are; how did these pandemic triggered impacts manifest among the different groups of women and girls? What are the different ways women and girls are already marginalised, and how that impacts their ability to cope with the pandemic? What are the short-term and long-term results of these manifestations on women and girls' lives in Uganda? What policies by the government have helped? What is missing?

The stories further interrogate what life was like for the women and girls before COVID; once the lockdown and curfew were announced, how did life change? Are there any positive changes out of innovation in crisis times? How are women placed in communities and families, and how does that shape their response to the pandemic impacts? The writers sought to show how women are coping or not coping, existing or stretched social safety nets, and the most urgent support needed.



PREVIEW OF STORIES TOLD

CROSS BORDER WOMEN TRADERS:

1

Cross-Border women trader at Busia – Uganda- Kenya border explores how one woman survived in these pandemic times but will her business survive? Countries closed borders as one of the earliest responses to the increasing cases of COVID-19 in the region. This impacted both immediate local border economies and the lives of women who depend on trade and the national economy. The border districts are also high-risk areas because of trucks' continuous movement from other countries, even in the lockdown.

2

WOMAN FROM MARGINALISED ETHNIC GROUPS:

The pandemic has exposed existing system failures in marginalised women's lives. The project shows how Batwa, indigenous communities on the Uganda-DRC border, already alienated in governance systems, have experienced pandemic times. The Batwa ethnic group suffers some of the highest poverty levels in the country. Just last year, the first female from the ethnic minority group graduated from a university. Economic violence, landlessness has always fueled gender-based discrimination and violence. Their marginalisation hampers access to public services like health access during a pandemic. On top of this, the border district was also put on lockdown longer than others.

LBTQ COMMUNITIES:

3

LBTQ communities struggle with system violence, discrimination, physical violence and unfair treatment in Uganda, where their lives are criminalised. During the lockdown government targeted groups of LGBTIQ persons and jailed them for 'violating social distancing rules' for living in the same shelter. Being targeted by the state and lack of social safety nets available for other Ugandan as often families don't accept LGBTI persons heightens vulnerability during the pandemic. The stories will capture intersections of different oppressions and their efforts to survive the pandemic economy's lockdowns and pressures.

4

WOMAN LIVING WITH A DISABILITY:

Women living with disabilities facing multiple marginalizations. The profiles will look out for how one woman's life was impacted in the lockdown and now. The story highlights social safety nets, government response for vulnerable families and gaps that remain. This profile also brings out issues of cities, accessibility and disability-friendly environments. It explores how curfews and restricted movements look like for people whose movements were already restricted.

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TEENAGE GIRL:

5

Girls in Uganda face many challenges as they navigate the transition to adulthood. Limited sex education and life skills and the constant threat of violence form homes to the streets. The profile is a teenager seeking shelter away from sexual violence at home during the pandemic sheds light on the growing second pandemic - gender-based violence, which has skyrocketed during the pandemic.

6

SEX WORKER:

Sex work is criminalised in Uganda. This puts sex workers at the cross-section of different kinds of violence- economic, physical and mental. Closures of businesses, hotels and restrictions on communal gatherings affected sex-workers. Truck drivers, who are their most significant clientele, were a high-risk population for COVID-19. The profile explores a story of a sex worker and how life has changed with continued restrictions on hotels, bars and gatherings. Sex workers were also targeted for extortion, harassment by law enforcement for arrests and parading before the media. There are also reports of sex work moved to online spaces; the story explores how that's going on.

YOUNG WOMEN AND UNEMPLOYMENT:

7

Young women in Uganda face a high unemployment rate; those who are employed are at the margins of companies, industries and the sectors they are in. Young women face a more extended education-work transition. Many young women are self-employed and work in the informal sector. This interview captures the life of a young woman 18-24, surviving the pandemic in the city in the face of job losses. A teacher who has had to adjust their life and work as a live-in domestic worker.

8

WOMEN URBAN REFUGEES:

Displacement and being a refugee poses unique challenges and vulnerability during an emergency like COVID-19. This profile brings out the story of survival and innovation by one Congolese woman refugee and businesswoman in Kampala.

WOMEN WORKING IN INDUSTRIES:

9

Often, industrial work is perceived as a male domain; however, many sectors rely predominantly on women's labour. The flower farming industry is one. This profile is about a woman who works at a flower farm in the Wakiso district. Flower farming was among the first to be hit by coronavirus induced closures abroad. In Uganda, 1000s of women work on these farms. This woman tells a story of increased workload and missing her family in the over one month stay at her workplace during the lockdown.

FEMALE-HEADED HOMES

10

Over 30 percent of households in Uganda are female-headed. In an economy where most women work in the informal sector with little job security, the pandemic has seen many unemployed for months. With school closures, child care being predominantly in women's hands, many women are juggling parenting, working from home and homeschooling. This profile explores a mother of 4, the pressures COVID has brought and how they are coping.

Four women's stories were documented the first week of January 2021 in West Nile districts of Nebbi, Pakwach and Arua where MEMPROW has current projects.

11

CHILD MOTHERS:

Two child mothers were interviewed one was struggling like most children to study during the school closures via radio. She shared the challenges of SRHR information and services that are unavailable and increased sexual violence which has resulted in a spike in teenage pregnancies. Teenagers in Uganda face many challenges as they navigate the transition to adulthood. Limited sex education and life skills, as well as the constant threat of violence from homes to schools to community is captured in these two stories. The stories also bring out issues of poverty and vulnerability of the young women and their families during the pandemic.

TRADER NAVIGATING LOCKDOWNS TO MAKE ENDS MEET

12

The team interviewed one trader who has had to navigate lockdowns and make ends meet with community safety nets like Saccos to keep her business against all the economic shocks as a result of the pandemic. During the enforcement of the lock down measures, the country was outraged by police violence against women stealing foodstuff from across the country. Closures cut off the daily income of women who often don't have long term saving.

13

WOMAN FARMER:

In Pakwach, the team interviewed one woman who had redirected her time to farming since the pandemic measures on gatherings affected her alcohol business. The story captures the versatility and quick adjustments women have been forced to make in order keep their families financially running and children that out of school engaged.

Teopista:

Experience of indigenous ethnic minority women

Teopista in front of her 'house'



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Reliant on tourism income, Batwa women struggle to feed families with the coronavirus crisis.

Mikingo Village in Kisoro municipality is home to hundreds of the Batwa people, Uganda's indigenous peoples. There are estimated to be 6,200 Batwa people, about 0.2 percent of Uganda's population, many of whom reside in Kisoro, the south-westernmost district bordering Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Jackeline Teopista is a 24-year-old mother of one child aged three who lives in Mikingo Batwa Community. She is the firstborn in her family which lives in another Batwa community in Kirundo sub county about 60 km from Kisoro town.

"I was born in Mukungu Batwa community where my parents live. I am the first of seven

children from my family. We are five girls and two boys. I dropped out of primary school when I was in primary one," Teopista narrates. "I was constantly abused and harassed by non-Batwa children for many reasons, including wearing dirty clothes, so I quit school."

Teopista recalls her days in school as difficult because her family couldn't afford any school materials and uniform, so she decided to stay home. She stayed with her parents until the age of eighteen when she headed for Kisoro town in search of a job. Here, she met Charles Kiwedde to whom she got married.

"Kiwedde and I met at a local brew bar in Kisoro town, and he looked nice and caring...



...before I agreed to get married to him," she says. "I was lucky that Charles lived in the Mikingo Batwa community where some of my relatives lived. I felt at home because my maternal aunt is married in the same Batwa community that I joined."

Mikingo village is on Mikingo hill just outside Kisoro town. It is a largely congested settlement with houses roofed with grass and old UNHCR tarpaulins. Sanitation is a major challenge in this settlement as there's a short distance between homes and pit latrines. Many lack essential household items like beddings and utensils.

"We continue to face discrimination. We are despised by some non-Batwa community members who say we are not clean enough to go near them while others who are empathetic employ us for casual labour. Some of us sleep on old blankets and bedsheets which were given to us by non-Batwa in the neighbouring communities," Teopista added.

Impact of COVID-19

Before the lockdown, Teopista's day to day life meant her joining other Batwa in Kisoro town to sing and dance for tourists that would fetch them an income. She would use it to buy food items for the family. Uganda recorded its first coronavirus case in March 2020 which was quickly followed by a strictly enforced lockdown that lasted till August.

"We could either go with our children or leave them where we stay as the older children of neighbours take care of the young ones. Once the lockdown was announced, life was suddenly grim. It got complicated because of lack of money to buy food since the tourists are no longer coming into Uganda," she narrates.

Teopista and her friends would also rely on collecting food from leftovers in various markets in Kisoro town for their meals. With a lockdown introduced, markets had to close to stop the spread of the coronavirus, which meant that for many Batwa within Kisoro town, their daily meal was cut off.

"I used to move around the garbage skips near Kisoro main market and hotels and restaurants gathering leftover food for a meal. The garbage skips went dry because the hotels and markets were closed. This did affect not only me but also the members of the Mikingo Batwa community in Kisoro district who struggle with food insecurity."

Teopista says the community resorted to gathering wild vegetables that they would boil and have as a meal.

Across the world, the tourism industry has been badly hit by coronavirus travel restrictions. Uganda's tourism is no different. It is estimated the country will lose \$1.6 billion this year in earnings from tourism as visitors stay away due to the impact of the coronavirus. But the effect on the lives of people like Teopista is often not fully captured when the impact on this virus is quantified.

Without the casual labour opportunities and occasional income from tourists, Teopista says most Batwa communities are facing the impacts of this health crisis in different ways. She also speaks about high-handed enforcement measures from security teams which prevented many of the members from seeking medical care during the lockdown.

"Look, I have been battling with decaying teeth and a sore mouth since June to date because I do not have money to buy face masks that are a requirement for one to be in a public place like health centres," she says.

Before COVID-19 hit, her community relied mainly on several NGOs which provided some medicines and relief items to them. She says so far only the Muhabura Diocese has delivered them some small quantities of posho and beans.

"These didn't last long, the family consumed them in a day or two," Teopista said.

During the early months of the lockdown, the government responded to struggling low-income communities but only within Kampala, the capital city. For the rest of the struggling communities across the country, it was assumed they had access to land and agricultural produce. But people like Batwa who have experienced landlessness for so many...



Unable to access health care,
Teopista nurses her sick tooth.



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... decades, the economic impact of the coronavirus crisis on them remains unattended.

The community has not seen COVID-19 cases but Teopista worries because they are struggling on many levels.

"If any of the Batwa community members contracted COVID-19, it might finish all of them because they cannot afford face masks and the price of buying soap to wash their hands," she says. "They also tell us that we need good feeding to increase our body immunity. This is just a dream because we do not have money to buy food and fruits."

She hopes that the government will bring special programs focused on Batwa displaced communities just like they do with refugees.

"The permanent solution to our current problems is for the government to buy land for us where we can do meaningful agriculture, be able to raise enough food for the family members and sell what is left. Buying land and building decent houses for us would end the suffering we endure on streets as beggars and the daily marginalisation by non-Batwa community members," she added.

She added that deliberate efforts by the government to engage in equipping them with hands-on skills such as carpentry, weaving mats, tailoring and professionalising their dance and drama would equally empower them economically.

Teopista says that the most pressing issues among the Batwa individuals remain poor housing facilities, lack of food, poor health, and not having land on which they can practice meaningful agriculture.





AKANKWASA:

Experience of indigenous ethnic minority women

The challenging story of Teopista (page 7-9) is not different from her colleague Patience Akankwasa of the same Batwa community. The mother of three children with the oldest aged 18 doesn't know how old she is. Akankwasa says that she separated with her husband a month before the lockdown was announced and the 8-months of lockdown have hit her hard. She had no means to put food on the table for the children.

"Before the lockdown, life was not as hard as it is today. Although I had separated with my husband over domestic issues, I would move around with my children to non-Batwa households doing some casual work such as digging in crop gardens, and we would get paid some money which we used to buy food items."

But with strict restrictions on movement during the lockdown, it was hard. "Even after relaxing some of the restrictions, it remained tough because we feared moving in public because we do not have face masks as required by the security personnel patrolling the streets in Kisoro town. When we fail to get green vegetables from the neighbouring bushes, we sleep on empty stomachs," says Akankwasa.

During the dry season of June-September, her Mikingo community experienced a shortage of clean water because the water harvesting tank constructed for them by the administration of the Diocese of Muhabura dried up. "It was in October 2020 when a well-wisher paid for the connection of National Water and Sewerage Corporation piped water which we are using. When food becomes a problem, we drink water and sleep," Akankwasa said.

The congested living conditions that Teopista, Akankwasa and their community live in is not by some accident. The Batwa lived for centuries as gatherers and hunter communities in the forests of Bwindi, Mgahinga and Echuya for



decades until the early 1990's when the government evicted them without any compensation. The forests were turned into national parks and forest reserves according to the colonial blueprint of separating people from natural forests. After being evicted, dispossessed of their ancestral lands, the Batwa people started living on the edges of the gazetted forests before some NGOs bought those small pieces of land where they had settled.

The land where most of them live now is not big enough to support their families' survival; they have some of the lowest human development indicators in the world. Batwa face high levels of discrimination and inequality, including access to education and labour opportunities; they remain mostly unrepresented in Uganda's political system from local councils to the national level. Capturing the plight of marginalised ethnic communities like Batwa remains a challenge not just for Uganda but the other three other countries- Rwanda, Burundi and DRC -where they reside. There is limited data on the socio-economic status of Batwa people, and they remain unrepresented in governance structures.



Esther Kalembe Teacher turned to domestic work to cope with the economic fallout of COVID-19

Esther Kalembe is a 24-year-old young woman with a warm smile that immediately puts one at ease. She currently lives in Mpererwe, a Kampala suburb but she grew up in Luuka district with her father as a single parent. Her parents separated when Esther was just three years old. The father, who was a brick maker, struggled to bring up Esther and her brother.

“Our father loved us so much, but sometimes he could fail to provide basic needs, and we would depend on neighbours for handouts,” she recalls.

At twelve years, Esther’s aunt, who was a midwife and ran a private clinic in Wandegaya, in the Kampala capital, decided to bring her to the city so she could access better education.

“My aunt really knew my father was struggling to raise us, and as a girl, it would be difficult for him to raise me into a responsible person in such an environment. She, therefore, insisted that my father let me stay with her instead,” Esther says.

It was a significant move not only because Luuka district has, for years, been one of the

lowest performing districts in education, but Esther could also finally have a guardian who could guide her through her teen years. After her senior four, Esther couldn’t get a sponsorship to go further in her education to A’ level despite many attempts. Her aunt could not afford to send her to A’ level so they agreed she would pursue a cheaper option. They settled for a teaching course dashing Esther’s dream of being a nurse just like her aunt. She took up a course in Early Childhood Development Learning.

“When it was clear I wouldn’t go far with secondary school, we looked for a course which could have an advantage. At least with teaching, I could find a job then be able to pay part of my tuition,” Esther narrates.

In 2017, Esther had just started her teaching course when an accident left her hospitalised for years. She was knocked by a speeding boda which left both bones in her left leg shattered. She spent two years at Mulago hospital. Her fighting attitude kept her going despite the excruciating pain she was in. The hospital bills were difficult to pay since the rider could not afford to cover them. He ran away, and the negotiations to pay part of the bill were between Esther’s family and the father of the hit-and-run rider.

"I had studied for one term and I got the accident before doing the exam. That means it was a dead year and I would have to repeat," she recalls. "The two years in the hospital were the worst in my life. At one point after six months, I had to undergo another operation on the leg but there was no money, so it was postponed and this prolonged my time of healing."

In 2019, Esther had recovered, and her next step was to go back to school and continue with her course, which would last two years. At the end of her first year, she was offered a teaching position at Sound Minds Gayaza Primary School as a lower-primary teacher. The monthly income of 150,000 UGX she earned went towards her tuition, which was a great relief to her aunt. By the start of 2020, Esther was already fully back to her feet, had a job and was hopeful about trying to make it on her own.

Then, COVID-19 was reported in Uganda in March 2020. Schools were some of the first public places to close, then a five months full lockdown followed.

Their school administration gave the teachers a half pay for that month as they released them. "Things were happening too fast. I didn't know what to think. We had just heard about the new virus affecting the whole world. Then it was here. And closure of schools announced," Esther narrates.

As the country went into lockdown a few days after school closures, public transport was halted so Esther could not go back to her aunt. She found herself with no place to live. A parent of a child she taught offered her a place to stay while the situation normalised. At first, it was easy, but as the government kept postponing the lockdown, life got harder for Esther.

"As time passed, it was not easy to depend on someone else being an adult, the money I got from school was already spent so I could not get even the basic things that I needed such as pads," she narrates.

Esther's aunt, who has always been her safety net, was also not spared by COVID-19 closures. She had always relied on university students, and now they were gone, back to their homes. No longer earning a daily income, she decided to close and found a way to head back to their home village. Esther was still stuck at the house of one of her students. Three months into the lockdown, it was unbearable. The family she

stayed with was also struggling. They couldn't house and feed her any longer.

"They were not telling me directly that I should leave, but the attitude would say it all. I started becoming uncomfortable around them, it was no longer peaceful like when I had just gone there," Esther narrates.

These were difficult times as Esther mused over her next move. Then one day, a friend called inquiring about a domestic worker to take care of her two little children. Esther grabbed this opportunity without a second thought. Her friend accepted.

"I did not see why I could not take up this job. There was no sign that schools were opening soon. I was in an appalling financial state," she recalls.

The job pays her 60,000 UGX per month. Although it is way less than her teaching salary, Esther has been able to take care of her basic needs and also send some money back to her father in the village. From this money, Esther must also save for her tuition in preparation for whenever schools open again.

Domestic work rarely attracts a minimum wage for the workload that is involved. It's among the lowest-paying jobs in the labour market. The position of women in the labour market tends to be characterized by their over-representation in low paid jobs in economic sectors or occupations in which women are concentrated according to the ILO report. It gets worse in this pandemic when families are struggling to care for children while also homeschooling.

The pandemic has pushed even women who were working in the formal sectors like Esther downwards back into informal unprotected jobs. Esther says domestic work is so demanding and hectic compared to teaching. She works long hours - morning to late nights. She also tries hard to keep up with her employer's high expectations of child care.

"I live with so much tension because I have been trusted with a life of two young children who I have to look after so well, sometimes I feel that my employer is not content, so I work even harder to please her," she says.

Ten months later, schools remain closed, only candidate classes have been able to go back. Esther's chances of bouncing back to her career are still undecided since she is a lower-primary teacher. She is hopeful that next year will be better. For now, she has adjusted to the work that saved her from desperation.



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A TEENAGER coping with the trauma of rape and family desertion

At the start of 2019, Jolly* had just finished primary five when her aunt delivered the terrible news. She could no longer afford to pay for Jolly's education. Jolly lost her parents when she was relatively young. She hardly remembers them. Her grandmother raised her with her aunt's support in Kaliro district. With her hopes of finishing primary school dashed, Jolly went back to her grandmother's.

Not long after, her maternal uncle visited and suggested he takes Jolly to Kampala. The uncle said Jolly would help take care of his four children since he and the wife had full-time day jobs. In return, they would enroll Jolly in a vocation school to learn hairdressing which was her wish at the time. This was good news to Jolly and her grandmother who were struggling with

basic needs. At fifteen, she headed to the city to start a new chapter of her life.

"I was happy because I had never been to the city and was hopeful my dreams would come to pass," Jolly narrates nostalgically. "I did not mind looking after my uncle's children because work is part of life." A year into the job, Jolly was still waiting for the promise of opportunity for vocational training to come to fruition.

Then in March 2020 coronavirus hit.

It remains engrained in Jolly's mind as the month things changed. COVID-19...



...lockdown was in force and changing patterns of work. Jolly's uncle would now stay home, but the wife who sold food continued to work outside the home. It was during these times, while the wife was away, that Jolly noticed her uncle's strange behaviour towards her.

"He started to pick fights with me over trivial matters. One day he came so close to me, and his eyes were very red, and I sensed he wanted to take advantage of me," she recalls. "I quickly told him I was on my period. He left and I thought that would be the end, but it left me shaken."

That would, however, not be the end of these forced advances. One day her uncle's wife ordered Jolly to prepare food only for herself and the children. There was no food when the uncle who had gone returned and he demanded to know why.

"I tried to explain but he was hitting me with a belt. He ordered me to lie on the floor with my head down in the sitting room," she narrates. "As I pleaded for forgiveness, I felt the man forcing himself on me. I could not scream, he was angry, so I just bore with this horrible act."

This state of terror would only get worse for Jolly. The uncle would rape her several other times between May and August 2020. Jolly says he would call the wife to monitor her movements and once the children were asleep in another room, he would come to Jolly's. It was after the fourth time that Jolly decided to confide in a neighbour.

"Our neighbour was shocked and said I cannot keep quiet. She was also worried I could get pregnant or even contract HIV so she advised me to report to local authorities secretly," narrates Jolly.

Jolly found the area chairman receptive but had many cases to handle that day. He

advised her to come back the next day but before Jolly could meet him again, the news had reached her uncle's wife.

"I was helping her make samosas when her friend called her," Jolly recalls. "She got off the phone, she asked me if that was true and I confirmed the whole story. She did not believe it saying my uncle could never do something like that to me."

The wife decided that Jolly was to be taken back to the village because she was dishonest. The next morning both Jolly's uncle and his wife took her back to her grandmother's place in Kaliro. The grandmother was distraught that Jolly had disappointed the family that sought to help her.

Back in Kampala, the chairperson approached the police and tipped them off even without Jolly. A few days after Jolly's forceful return to the village, the uncle was arrested. Desperate to rescue her husband, the uncle's wife rushed to the village with some relatives to convince Jolly to change her statement. Two days later, she was driven back to Kampala against her will.

"It was my aunt, my grandfather, and my uncle's friend who ordered me to enter the car quickly. When I got in, they sat around me asking me if I wanted to see my uncle rot in jail," she recounts. "When I said yes, they burst out and laughed loudly because they were not expecting that answer from me."

They claimed Jolly had lied about the rape. Jolly was forced into the car just the way they found her. On arrival in Kampala, they forced Jolly to take a pregnancy test, which was negative, before proceeding to the police. They hoped to secure her uncle's release on claims that Jolly had lied. At this point, many relatives had threatened her for embarrassing the family. Jolly spent four days in police cus-

NAVIGATING PANDEMIC TIMES AS A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY IN A WHEELCHAIR

While the pandemic threatens all members of society, people with disabilities are disproportionately impacted due to attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers that have been reproduced in the COVID-19 response according to the United Nations OHCHR 2020 report. People with disabilities face discrimination from housing, transport, education, employment, health services to information technology. This exclusion means fewer opportunities for education, employment and involvement in politics and the making and implementation of policies. The needs and concerns of people with disabilities in the coronavirus pandemic, as in many other emergencies, are often an after-thought despite them being one of the most vulnerable populations.



“People with disabilities face discrimination from housing, transport, education, employment, health services to information technology.”

At 29, Naome Akwee is an emerging business woman and a Disability Inclusion Facilitator at Light for the World, an international disability and development organization. She is a paraplegic, paralysed from the waist downwards at 20 when she lost the use of her legs. "I had an infection of the spine; I could still move with a little support and went to Mulago Hospital for check-ups. I could still feel a little in my toes and could feel pain in my legs," she narrates. "After two months in the hospital, the doctors could tell it was an infection but they didn't know what had caused it. They thought it was Tuberculosis but the tests were negative so they just discharged me and said I should start physiotherapy."

Back at home, she started undergoing rehabilitation and it was hoped she would be back to her feet. It took her another year to access a wheelchair. It was during this time that Naome was involved in a car accident, with her brother driving. She suffered a complete spinal cord injury and has never walked again.

"I remember it was August 25, 2011. I can never forget that day," she recalls emphatically. "A combination of the spinal cord infection that I had and now a traumatic spinal cord injury. That's how I became a wheelchair user."

As a woman with a disability, Naome is no stranger to hardships especially living in a city built without regard for how physical and social barriers affect people with

disabilities. Moving from one place to another has always been particularly difficult for her because she is in a wheelchair and relies on public transportation.

"Before COVID-19 transportation was already difficult for me as a wheelchair user because

I have to use a taxi and there is an attitude problem. Someone just says, 'nze sitwaala balema, balina ebisilani [I don't carry passengers with disabilities because they come with bad luck] or someone says 'I am not going to take you, you people waste time,'" Naome explains. "But I overcame that because I realised we need to create more awareness so that people understand that people with disabilities also need to move around. Being a congested city, it's always hard for me to access the things I need like fabric, yarn, or if my sewing machine is down."

COVID-19 pandemic has intensified these hardships. Naome ran a crocheting and knitting business before the pandemic. When the country was on lockdown, she was not earning an income anymore. Post-lockdown, her business has not recovered because of the economic hardships that are being felt across the country. As a result, Naome had outstanding rent bills that had accumulated for five months because her business had stalled.

"I always live alone but when fears of a lockdown spread, my brother came to live with me. He came on Saturday morning, a day after schools were closed," she nar-

rates. "We were stressed and depressed wondering how we were going to survive. My brother and I were living off my savings, it was just a mess. I think that is one of the things that fuelled my stress and depression. Waking up in the night and your heart is just pounding rent, rent, rent. It was too bad... too bad!"

Naome has always used online spaces like Facebook and WhatsApp to market her crocheting business. But during the lockdown, orders were on hold and she couldn't knit and crochet anymore. Naome was lucky to get an order to make 300 masks for Light for the World in late June 2020.

Restrictions on movements affected how society socialises and kept healthy and Naome was no exception. She used to play wheelchair basketball at Makerere University.

"I would go very early, play basketball and come home to do my work. Now I couldn't go because all the activities at Makerere stopped," she says. "There is no court near me where I can go to play now. Stress accumulates so it's good to meet people and talk and share our problems, but we can't socialise now so it affects you."

Missed doses

Having a spinal injury requires Naome to take medication every day. She gets treatment from Katakalewa Cheshire Hospital in Kanyanya, the opposite side of where she lives in Seguku. She missed her dose for two weeks during lockdown. This was the worst challenge she faced that caused her a lot of distress on top of financial insecurity.

"The medicine is mostly to help my bladder to contain urine for a longer time," she explains. "The injury affects the bladder, bowels and sensation but mine mostly affected the bladder. If I don't have my medicine, I can't be the independent woman like you are seeing now, I will just be worried all the time especially when

there is no accessible toilet."

Naome had to avoid drinking any liquids even when she was largely at home. This medicine is key for her to live with dignity. She had to rely on a friend to send the medicine through a boda paying the high delivery fees.

Social support is key

Naome says her family has been very supportive, something not all persons with disability have. She gets additional social support from the Spinal Injuries Association of Uganda, which helped her adapt to her situation and introduced her to sports in the first place. She is, however, aware the situation could be less challenging for people with disability if only the government COVID-19 response was inclusive.

"There were no persons with disabilities making decisions. They gave female sex workers food. I think they are marginalised just like people with spinal cord injuries, or people who are gay, they should have included us in the decision making," she says.

She did not receive any support, no food or masks from the government. The only food supplies came from her church twice which kept her afloat. Naome hopes the pandemic changes employers' attitudes towards rights of people with disability since more people are working from home. In September 2020, Naome took up a new job at Light for the World in Uganda as a disability inclusion facilitator doing what she loves, responding to needs of persons with disabilities. "I always look at life in a positive way ever since I accepted my situation. I envision a world where people with spinal cord injuries take up space because many see me as a role model," she says with enthusiasm. "I don't want to let them down. I want to see a future where everyone participates equally in life, I like saying that from my wheelchair perspective, everything is very bright."

KEEPING A FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLD AFLOAT IN PANDEMIC TIMES COMES WITH ADDITIONAL STRAIN

Elizabeth (not real name) buries her head into her hands, crying tears of exhaustion. We are seated in her mother's small living room while her four children – including a set of twins – are in another part of the house with their grandmother.

"I am tired," Elizabeth says, unable to control the tears that have been threatening to pour since she started narrating her experience. In this one phrase, Elizabeth is summing up the exhaustion she's carried taking care of her family with an absent partner, heightened by a raging pandemic.

At 30, she is a mother of four, her oldest daughter is nine and the youngest, a set of twins – a boy and girl – are almost three. She lives with her mother in a rented apartment in Kiwango, Mukono District. The father of her children with whom she had been in an on-and-off relationship for 11 years left for the Netherlands three years ago and does not send child support. He left when the twins were still babies, just starting to crawl.

"He will tell you that you need to go back to his parent's home then I will give you support. He wasn't happy when I left his parents' home and moved in with my mom.," Elizabeth narrates.

Elizabeth manages her sister's grocery store business where she earns 132,000 UGX per month, excluding transport and a daily allowance of 7000 UGX. A Fine Art graduate of Makerere University, Elizabeth also earns some money from sewing when she gets the orders in. When the government announced the total lockdown, her biggest fear was how to get back her last-born children. The twins were visiting their paternal grandparents at the time so she could wean them off breast milk on the other side of the city.

"I felt so bad because I was planning to bring the twins back home. It was heart-breaking because I had missed them for

some months already," she says. "I thought about getting a letter from the authorities to allow me to move but it was also hard because you had to walk many kilometres to Mukono to process the travel documents. I cried and my daughter was like mummy, it's okay you will see them after."

With all the panic and not really knowing what the pandemic was like or how long it would last, it was a difficult time for the young mother. But luckily her family was very supportive and encouraged her to be firm. The good news is that the grocery store stayed open even if business was slow because people were afraid to come to the shops. However, the first three weeks of the lockdown she couldn't go to work because it was too far to walk.

"I tried to walk to work on two occasions but I spent so much time walking it just wasn't worth it. I had to plan to sleep at the shop and come back on weekends. My mom was here so she could take care of the kids with the maid and my young sister."

According to the 2019 World Bank report, 28.3 percent of households in Uganda are headed by women. Like many women around the world, the Covid-19 pandemic increased the double-duty of childcare and work as schools remained closed. This increased challenges for women-headed households as it diminished the women's ability to continue working without child care support as they faced knock-on effects on household income.

Even when travel restrictions were lifted, Elizabeth says it's still challenging for her to shoulder the homeschooling needs of two of her children. She can't afford to enroll them in online classes like many parents in Kampala are doing. Their schools, however, provide materials for home study. This means every morning, Elizabeth has to sit down with the children and help them with studying before going to work.

Elizabeth admits that without her family

support, she probably wouldn't have managed this well. Government programmes that were supposed to distribute food relief across the country during the lockdown never reached her community.

"We didn't get any government food; they didn't come to this whole area. But I am used to buying supplies for a week or a month and stock. I don't have to buy things every day. In case my children are sick, my family is always there for me," Elizabeth said. Elizabeth hopes to buy sewing machines to build her tailoring business, and hopefully, become more independent.

"I love jumpers, I like making men stuff and selling to friends. Even now if someone wants something made, I contact my network of friends to do the work and we split the money."

According to a Lancet report, the pandemic has affected women and girls disproportionately, deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic. Women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs, and are more likely to be employed in the informal sector. Women have less access to social protections and are the majority of single-parent households. Their capacity to absorb economic shocks is therefore less than that of men. The report concludes by urging governments to make real commitments to reduce gender inequalities.

CROSS-BORDER WOMEN TRADERS STRUGGLE WITH THE PANDEMIC-INDUCED ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN



Suzan Sharita Natocho is arranging about 20 trays of eggs at her stall as she prepares for the day's work in Arubaine market, in Busia town on the Uganda-Kenya border. It's almost 9:00 am and this is the daily trade for the 31-year-old who is a single parent to her three children. She has just recently returned to work after months of lockdown rendered her jobless. She says before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, her business selling eggs across the Uganda-Kenya border was booming.

"Each day I was selling about 100-200 trays of eggs, and the majority of my customers were from Kenya," Natocho recounts. "I was making a good profit from selling eggs and would be able to provide basic needs, including paying school fees for my children."



At the Border, women looking for alternative income from panning Gold

Natocho is one of about 2000 women cross border traders in Arubaine market. She says with a capital of about Ushs 5 million, she would have 500-1000 trays of eggs in a week to sell. On some lucky days, traders from Kenya would come and buy all the eggs from her stall at the Sofia border market where she operated. By the start of 2020, Natocho had been running this business for two years and she had prospects of expanding. She was planning to open another stall to cater to the growing clientele.

"I opened with the capital of about 1.5 million UGX, but within a short period my stock had more than doubled," she narrates.

In March, as the coronavirus slowly spread to East African countries, the government decided to close the borders as a way to stem the daily rise in cases. Border districts, because of high movements among people, were seen as more vulnerable and that meant more vigilant enforcement of movement and trade restrictions. For traders like Natocho, business opportunities were shattered. The closure of the border meant that there were no more customers for her business. The sudden announcement of COVID-19 restrictions meant she had not planned on storage and all her eggs got rotten.



Meet Suzan Sharita Natocho,
the cross-border egg trader

"I lost so many trays of eggs, the closure of the market worsened the situation because we were abruptly forced out of the market," Natocho said. "With the market closed and no customers, prices for eggs collapsed which has been huge setback for my business."

For more than five months, Natocho had to stay home without work. She was sustained by her little savings to provide basics for her family throughout the lockdown.

"I was not working yet basic demands for the family persisted, forcing me to spend most of the money I had saved on my bank account," She says.

By the time the lockdown was eased, Natocho had spent most of her capital and what remained of her once-booming business was about Ushs 1 million.

"I have reopened a stall in Arubaine market

but the capital I have is too low compared to what I was operating with before the outbreak of COVID-19," she says, "despite the easing of restrictions which have involved the opening of the border, my customers who were mostly from Kenya haven't returned."

Natocho has tried taking on e-business measures to market her eggs online but says some unscrupulous customers across the border take the goods but later fail to send money on delivery. She says high transport costs are another major hindrance to her business.

Natocho says it is challenging to run her struggling business and provide basic needs for her family including child care since schools are still closed. She fears that she might not be able to provide school fees for her children when schools finally open. Natocho has also had to raise money for rent for her two-roomed rented facility. She thinks soft loans from the government to shield small businesses like hers from shocks from the COVID-19 pandemic are urgently needed.

A 2019 Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs (MIWE) found that Uganda, Ghana and Botswana have highest percentage of women business owners in the world. The ranking found that women were achieving gender parity with men in terms of entrepreneurship and that one in three businesses or 33.8% of businesses in Uganda belong to women. Despite female entrepreneurs often lacking access to financial and human capital, the Index results revealed that "female entrepreneurs in developing countries are driven by grit and determination, along with a desire to provide for their families." Women entrepreneurs like Natocho are the backbone of economic growth and in the face of a pandemic, their businesses slowing down is a key indicator of what is happening to the economy.

The restrictions and continued environment of fear of contracting the virus continue to impact businesses. Marian Babu, the chair of the Busia Cross Border Women Traders Association says the outbreak of the coronavirus has devastated their businesses, leaving most of the women without any capital. Babu says the majority of the women in cross border trade are single parents who had survived on the small businesses to provide and sustain their families.



‘YOU COULD BE ARRESTED ANYTIME’- A SEX WORKER’S LIFE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Amina Nakato has been a sex worker for many years now. This work puts food on her table and pays school fees for her children. Nakato was also able to buy a piece of land. Sex work is criminalised in Uganda, and the majority of people like Nakato face immense challenges daily in their work from stigma to sexual and physical abuse which worsened when the country imposed drastic measures to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Uganda registered its first cases of coronavirus in March 2020, and the country went under lockdown immediately. With the lockdown, public gatherings were banned, bars, nightclubs and lodges closed, and a dusk-to-dawn curfew was imposed.

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WOMEN’S RESILIENCE IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

INVAWG Uganda Biannual reporting: October 2020-March 2021.
Feminist Response to Exclusion and Gender Violence (FeRe)





"The realities of our work depend on bars and lodges being open, but we were blocked from accessing the lodges where we used to meet our clients and police were constantly harassing us," says the soft-spoken mother of three.

During the lockdown, police arrested sex workers in various districts, for allegedly defying Ministry of Health guidelines on COVID-19 prevention.

Sex workers responded with a protest and demanded that the government instead develop an emergency strategy to meet their needs and that of their communities, with social protection as a cornerstone of such a response.

Despite the risk of facing arrest and harassment, Nakato continued to show up for work on the streets because she had to feed her children and pay house rent.

"It was risky coming out to work because you could be arrested by the police anytime. And sometimes the risk was not worth it because even if you showed up, there were no clients," Nakato narrates. "In some cases, the few clients we got did not want to pay the money we were asking for."

Nakato, who is also a peer-educator and helps younger women navigate the often-hostile environment that people engaged in sex work face, says on a good day, she used to earn between 60,000-100,000 UGX. During the lockdown, her daily income came down to as low as 20,000 UGX, and that was on a good day.

"Sometimes there are no clients, and you don't make anything, and the family is waiting for food at home," explains Nakato, adding that on days when she and other sex workers did not make money, their only meal for the day was porridge.

On some days, if she was lucky, she

earned money from her regular long-term clients who often reached out to her by phone. "But these were few and far apart since most of them are bodaboda riders, truck or taxi drivers who also lost a significant source of their incomes with the lockdown."

Sex work is still highly stigmatised; this means those involved in it are often subjected to sexual abuse and discrimination. Sex workers are also some of the most economically and socially marginalized groups of people in Uganda who face violations of their rights. From the people who procure their services to law enforcement agencies who use the excuse of minor offences such as being idle and disorderly to lock them up, the lives of sex workers in Uganda remain unprotected. Nakato has been a victim of both.

"Sometimes, I find myself with a client who does not want to use protection. One time a client refused to pay, and when I demanded the money, he drew a gun at me," Nakato remembers. She has also been locked up by police before and then released without any charges.

"They come to the street and round us up for being idle and disorderly or dressing indecently. They arrest us and leave the clients. But what they usually want is for us to pay bribes. If you don't pay, they harass you," says Nakato.

This harassment heightened during the lockdown as sex workers were accused of contributing to the spread of the coronavirus because of their close association with long-distance truck drivers, who in the early days of the pandemic accounted for a significant proportion of COVID-19 cases in the country. Besides police harassment and violations, many sex workers have been excluded from the few available social benefits and are rarely included in public responses to emergencies. When

the government distributed emergency food relief to vulnerable groups during the lockdown, several sex workers say they were excluded on account of the kind of work that they do.

"When we went out to collect the free food that the government was distributing, we were told to return to our respective homes if we wanted food because where we were living was illegal and that we were engaging in illegal activities," says Nakato.

At the time, Nakato and several other sex workers were residing at one of the local lodges in the outskirts of the city. It is also here that they used to get their clients. "Most of the sex workers come from different parts of the country. When the lockdown was announced and the movement of cars was banned, they had no way of returning to their respective homes. We were all stuck in one place," she explains.

Many then had to depend on the generosity of organizations working to protect the rights of sex workers to get relief food. According to Nakato, many HIV-positive sex workers who were on anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) had to interrupt their treatment because they had no access to food. "Being their leader, they would come to me and say they don't have food to eat and so they couldn't take their medi-

cine. But when we got some relief food from well-wishers, they were able to return to medication," says Nakato.

With COVID-19 restrictions eased, Nakato says, she, too, has resumed work and clients are slowly starting to return. However, with the night curfew still in place, her work pattern has also changed. She spends five days of the week at the lodge where she pays 10,000 UGX per night and returns home to her children on the weekend. With her children, she has to spend a few hours before returning to her workplace.

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Many then had to depend on the generosity of organizations working to protect the rights of sex workers to get relief food. According to Nakato, many HIV-positive sex workers who were on anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) had to interrupt their treatment because they had no access to food.

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"I cannot keep away from work for a long time since the money I make cannot sustain us. We live hand to mouth. Currently, one of my children is in Primary Seven, which is a candidate class. They have returned to school, but I haven't even paid school fees yet," she says worryingly.

Also, before COVID-19, she used to work mostly at night and sleep during the day, but the pandemic times have changed her work life. "Now, with the curfew in place at 9:00 pm, we get most of the clients during the day. So, we work in the day and sleep in the night," she says. Even though she is back to work, Nakato is aware of the risk the coronavirus poses to her and her fellow sex workers. "That is why we have told our members to stock up on face masks and hand sanitizers," she says.

IN THE SHADOW

OF THE PANDEMIC, REFUGEE ENTREPRENEUR STRIVES TO SUCCEED

Judith Kanyere Mwenge commutes to Kampala's Central Business District where she works as a tailor six days a week. She has to navigate the city's busy roads and traffic despite suffering a knee problem which has contributed to her health deteriorating. In her shop located in one of downtown Kampala's crammed buildings, colourful materials of African print textiles line the wooden shelves, while others hang across from the door to attract customers. On top of sewing clothes, she also sells the materials.

Mwenge starts speaking English, and then switches to Luganda, the language of trade in the city and the people of Buganda. They are languages she has learnt interacting with locals here in the last nine years. She is one of the estimated 98,000 urban refugees living and working in Uganda. She left her home country, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), because of insecurity, and arrived in Uganda in 2011.

Decades of conflicts and insecurity in neighbouring countries such as DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, South Sudan and Ethiopia, has led to a surge of refugees, making Uganda the top most refugee-hosting nation in Africa. It is also among the top ten worldwide with an estimated 1.4 million refugees as of 2019.



"My family was under constant attacks. They wanted to set our house on fire because of land wrangles which were exacerbated by the lawlessness in Goma, the region where I hail from," says Mwenge.

Then one night, some unidentified men came looking for her husband and threatened to kill him. Luckily, he was away attending a funeral. That is when the family decided they would seek safety elsewhere. At the time, Mwenge was running a shop that sold building materials. While it was thriving, her family's protection was paramount. And so, without carrying any personal belongings, Mwenge, her husband, two children, and a brother made the journey on foot to the border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. From here, they took a bus to Kampala where they have lived since then.

"We arrived here with nothing. My family back home had to send us money to pay rent for the first few months. Other refugees who had stayed here longer than us also sometimes gave us food and money," she narrates.

This support, however, was short-lived. Mwenge continued to struggle, unable to afford basic needs, regular meals,


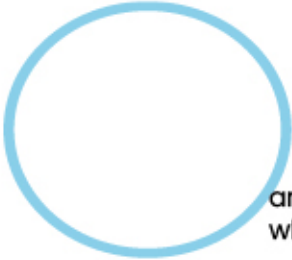
and school fees for her children. Since she was already a skilled tailor, she opted to start sewing to make a living.

"I started by renting a sewing machine, but because I did not have customers, my friends always gave me work to sew designs that their customers had already ordered," says Mwenge.

She did this for a few months before raising enough money to buy her own sewing machine and then she started to work for herself. Although life continues to be a daily struggle, Mwenge has used the little income she makes from the business to ensure her children have access to education while they are here. However, in recent months, the coronavirus pandemic has made life more challenging for her.

Today, she makes much of her income from producing and selling masks because the demand is still high.

When the country was put under total lockdown between March and June, only allowing what is considered essential services to operate, that left Mwenge automatically out of work. With an injured knee, she couldn't engage in activities outside of her home. Finding food for the family became a big challenge. She fell behind on rent and was threatened with eviction. She said the situation was made worse by the fact that she does not have



any family members in Uganda who could be her safety net.

"I was always anxious about what would happen next. If they evicted me from the house, where would I find a place to live when I don't have money?" Mwenge asks.

"My sewing machines were locked up in town because the lockdown was announced suddenly. So, at first, I had no way of sewing clothes from home."

As time passed, Mwenge was lucky when another refugee friend offered to lend her a spare sewing machine. She had to seize an opportunity in the newly needed mandatory mask-wearing regulations. She started making masks from her home. Mwenge then taught her 16 and 18 two daughters how to sew the masks, which they would then sell in the community. "That is how we were able to go through the lockdown. Had it not been for my friend, I don't know how I would have gone through this period," says Mwenge.

Today, she makes much of her income from producing and selling masks because the demand is still high.

"Every day, with the help of my children, we can make ten dozen masks. I make some from the shop here while my daughters make some from home," she says.

The masks are often bought by wholesalers who then go and sell them to customers on the streets and markets. With fewer customers now at the main shop in town, Mwenge's other challenge at the moment is how to raise the monthly rent for the shop that she shares with another colleague. Together

they pay a monthly rent fee of 1.7million UGX (460 USD).

"With the capital I have at the moment; I am not able to raise that money. I went to ask the landlord to reduce the rent, but he said if I could not afford it, I was free to vacate the premises," says Mwenge. "These days, I don't get the kind of customers I used to have before the COVID-19 outbreak. But if I stay home, I will have nothing to eat, so I come here every day hoping some days will be better."

Recently, she approached a humanitarian organisation that works with refugees and displaced people asking for support for her business.

"They called me recently to ask about the location of my business. I hope they will support me with the financial capital to bring my business back to life."

For now, selling masks is what is putting food on her table every day and Mwenge remains hopeful and dedicated to bringing her business back to the pre-COVID-19 success.

"Hopefully everything will come to normal again, and we start getting more customers. This has been a difficult year," she concludes.



“I HAVE LOST FIVE FRIENDS”: SURVIVING THE PANDEMIC WHILE TRANSGENDER IN UGANDA

Growing up, Hannington was always isolated by siblings and in the neighbourhood where he lived with his family.

“My siblings often said I was shaming them because I was a lesbian. They never liked to go to school with me in the family car or interact with me. I, therefore, asked my father to give me money and would use public transport to school,” Hannington recounts.

This affected him emotionally and mentally, forcing him to run away

from home at a young age. For three years, life was a daily struggle as he moved from one Kampala slum to another, trying to find a safe community that offered a sense of belonging and safety.

“I was tired of being with people who were homophobic. Each time I dressed like a boy, they would say, look at this spoilt girl. I always told my family, “You just don’t wake up one day and say you are going to be trans or lesbian. You are born that way. It’s in you.”

At school, Hannington faced similar discrimination and was even expelled. In Kampala’s poor neighbourhoods where he ended up living, there was no job or the prospect of finding one. Instead, together with his newfound friends, they spent time indulging in drugs. The anxiety of living life on the edge resulted in him suffering a mental breakdown.

“At that time, I didn’t even know that someone can be depressed, but I was depressed for a very long time and had no counsellor

and no one to talk to," says Hannington, who describes himself as a free-spirited person who likes to see people happy at all times. This personality is reflected in the way he tells his life story. He speaks with ease about what he has gone through over the years and says this openness has made him a stronger person.

Despite his strong-spirited personality, when Hannington suffered a mental breakdown, he feared to go to a public facility because of the discrimination he was likely face there. It was around this period that someone introduced him to a human rights organisation that offered support to sexual minorities.

"From the first time I came to the organisation, they have been like a family to me. They have offered me employment so I can take care of my needs," he says.

Uganda doesn't recognise diverse gender identities and expression, and transgender persons face several challenges ranging from unfair treatment to overt and other forms of violence. These realities of other LGBTI persons remain widespread in many African countries, and the coronavirus pandemic has added more layers to it.

Hannington is a trans man who is also HIV positive. When the country imposed a nationwide lockdown, he decided to go and live with a friend, hoping the lockdown was temporary and life would return to normal within a few weeks. At that point, he had antiretroviral (ARVs) drugs that would last him two more weeks.

"I thought about my life. I asked myself how I was going to get my medication since public transportation was banned and I started getting depressed. I was alone most of the time and missed being with people in my community. Being a transgender person during lockdown was hard," he narrates.

Hannington's access to ARVs is through a

non-governmental organisation that provides health services to marginalised and often vulnerable, communities in the country including sexual minorities and sex workers because of state-enforced homophobia and transphobia. Non-acceptance within families and communities, and a loss of support networks also puts LGBTI persons at risk in the face of unprecedented health and economic crises.

Hannington could not go to a public health facility for services because of the fear of being discriminated against or profiled. "I talked to my counsellor who promised to help me access the drugs but that did not come through. After completing the ARVs that I had, I spent two weeks without taking my medicine. I was thinking about what was going to happen to me next. There was no food, there was no money," says Hannington.

With no hope of support coming through, he decided to go to a nearby pharmacy to buy septrin, a drug that is often used to fight opportunistic infections among people living with HIV. He adds that many of his friends who are also living with HIV could not access medication. "At least five of them have died of HIV related complications since the pandemic started in Uganda," he says.

HIV infections remains a significant challenge for sexual minority groups in Uganda because the criminalisation of these communities exacerbates it. This criminalisation and the stigma mean that the majority are not able to access HIV prevention and treatment services.

Data from the Uganda AIDS Commission shows key populations, which often includes transgender persons and men who have sex with men are some of the biggest drivers of the HIV epidemic in the country, with HIV incidence among this group averaging about 4,300 new infections per 100,000.

Transgender people are an important key population for HIV risk globally, and several studies have found prevalence rates among this population to be significantly higher than those among other key populations such as men who have sex with men (MSM). There is a lack of research on transgender populations in Africa, and at present, there is almost no available data on HIV prevalence and risk among transgender people on the continent, according to this study.

Apart from discrimination in health access, LGBTI persons are also more likely to be denied access to social services and other economic opportunities. These vulnerabilities were not considered in the governments' response strategy to the COVID-19 pandemic, further bringing to light the systemic exclusion and marginalisation that sexual minorities and non-binary persons continue to face in the country every day.

During the lockdown, many members of the LGBTI community were caught in between trying to survive contracting the coronavirus and an intolerant system. For instance, when the lockdown was introduced in March and public gatherings were restricted, law enforcement officials raided a shelter where 19 LGBTI persons who had been left homeless sought refuge. Police accused the group of violating social distancing rules that banned public gatherings of more than ten people.

They were released after six weeks in prison, after several LGBTI rights advocates publicly challenged the government and continued to provide legal aid. This incident is just one of several over the years, where sexual minorities have increasingly been a target for violence, arrests, and exclusion.

Although the Constitutional Court overturned a law that criminalised same-sex relations in 2014, LGBTI persons continue to face routine arrests and harassment from law enforcement officers. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hannington says much of the social and financial support that they received came through organizations that work with sexual minorities.

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“They gave us food and money. I never received any support from

my family,” he says. He has also been at the forefront of advocating for financial support to take care of the needs of economically marginalized sexual minority groups in the poor neighborhoods of the city. With the lockdown eased, and life slowly returning to normal, Hannington is focused on ensuring he remains in good health. “I take my medication every day without fail. Life is precious. If you don’t take care of it, who will

WAITING FOR FLOWERS TO BLOOM AGAIN: AWUDE REFLECTS ON HOW THE PANDEMIC HAS SHAPED HER WORK

It is almost 6:00 pm. The sun has disappeared behind the cloudy sky and there is a calm breeze blowing in Bwerenga Central, Wakiso district, just 30 kilometres outside the capital Kampala. Specioza Awude, a delightful woman, evident from the warm welcome she gives, has just ended her workday.

Awude is a supervisor at a flower farm where she has worked for fifteen years. "I love the smell of fresh flowers, the roses of different colours fascinate me," says the

50-year-old mother of five and grandmother radiantly. "I enjoy the work I do, and I'm proud of it."

Awude has been her family's sole provider since her husband passed away in 1998. "I have had to educate my five children – four boys and one girl. The firstborn is 32 and the last who is 22 finished senior six. We are still looking for money for him to join a tertiary institute," says Awude.

She also has two grandchildren and she says this job has helped her take care of them.



In March 2020, the Uganda government pronounced a nation-wide lockdown in a bid to curb the spread of the coronavirus. The lockdown entailed a ban on both public and private transport, public gatherings and many workplaces closed. However, the agricultural sector was permitted to continue as long as employees stayed at their place of work. "It seems like the pre-COVID-19 days were ages ago," Awude gathers her thoughts. "Life wasn't really good. I have always been the one taking care of everything at home."

Awude has lived in Bwerenga since she moved in with the father of her children. She dropped out of school at an early age because she got pregnant and married the father of the child.

"He did what he could to see me through this first pregnancy. He had a grocery shop which took care of our daily needs. I would look after the children," she says.

Awude would supplement the income by farming food crops. She says they shared laughter and love for their children. "When he died," she pauses and stares down at her hands resting on her lap, "I had to find a way to look after the children. The responsibility of fending for the family has since rested on my shoulders. It has been tough."

By the time restrictions to curb the spread of the coronavirus were enforced, Awude, like many of Uganda's women-headed households, was already stretched, providing for the family. According to the Uganda National Household Survey 2016/17, 31 percent (3 in every 10) of the homes were headed by women.

Awude was lucky that she still had a job even though with newer, more challenging conditions. The flower farm provided masks and hand sanitiser for workers.

The employers then required that work-

ers reside at the flower farm. Awude and a few other women moved into rooms allocated by the farm management. "We were there for 35 days. We were given meals; breakfast at 6:30 am, lunch at 1:00 pm and supper at 8:00 pm," she explains. "The first nights were long. I had never spent a night away from my grandchildren. I tossed and turned because I wasn't sure if they were okay; if they had eaten. I couldn't wait to go home to them."

Awude is aware that her freedom to stay on and work despite the crisis is not accessible to most women.

"The door was open to everyone, but those with other responsibilities couldn't come to work. I am lucky that my children have all grown. I didn't have to worry about them," she says. "If you get the chance to work, you have to work," she asserts.

However, many other women could not make it.

"Some of my married colleagues were not able to work because their husbands opposed the idea of staying at the work premises."

Awude highlights a challenge for women and work, which remains an impediment to women's economic freedoms. Often women's decision to about their work, even under such emergencies remains out of their hands. This means more women are likely to be affected by unemployment when a crisis like COVID-19 hits.

Awude also says her workmates who had younger children could not make it to work. The accommodation was only for a worker; not their family members. The female labour force largely upholds the flower farming industry in both Uganda and the region. With fewer women able to work during the crisis, the burden of increased workload fell on those who stayed.

"For the whole of April, we would work from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm yet we were used to working from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm. It was too much," Awude says. With people all over the world staying home and events cancelled, the flower industry that thrives on celebrations is among the most affected. Everything came to a halt.

"The farm management told us that people were not buying flowers as much as they used to, so we are counting this one as a dead year," she says.

After the lockdown, public transport fares were hiked due to social distancing rules which meant vehicles could now only carry half of the passengers they used to take before. They had to make up for the losses. Awude now opts to do the fifteen-minute walk to work every morning and back home every evening.

"After the lockdown, I realised I couldn't spend on transport every day. I would rather walk and use that money to buy charcoal. Besides, exercise is good for the body," she says with a titter.

Like most people, Awude's social life has also suffered because of the pandemic. "I fear sitting with my friends for a long time, and most of them don't wear their masks." She says their conversations are now shorter because they have to stay safe. After a long day's work, tired, Awude spends time with her family. She

misses a 'normal' life. "Now, all visitors have to sit outside such that there is enough space for social distancing."

Even then, she worries about her grandchildren because they play all day with children in the neighbourhood. Awude believes we can all do our part to make sure we stay safe.

"If we act carelessly, the virus will stay and we shall all continue suffering."

Support needed

Specioza says the cost of getting medication for her family remains too high. The nearest government health centre

is often fully packed and often out of medicine, so she pays out of pocket at private clinics which are overpriced.

With all the attention on COVID-19, the daily health struggles of families in Uganda for the last few months have not been highlighted. Yet even in the middle of the pandemic, family providers like Specioza have to contend with a healthcare system that doesn't provide the bare minimum to citizens.

"We need support with healthcare. If I don't spend on medicine, I can have some more money to save at least," Awude says.

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After the lockdown, I realised I couldn't spend on transport every day. I would rather walk and use that money to buy charcoal. Besides, exercise is good for the body

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LIVING THROUGH THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AS A TEEN MOTHER

Jane Adiru* dreamed of becoming a teacher one day. She had good grades at school and aspired to help underprivileged girls like herself to access education. Once she made it, Adiru would build a decent house for her mother and support her younger siblings.

But her dreams were cut short. Now aged 18, with a nineteen-month-old son, Adiru is at her mother's two-roomed house on Arua city's outskirts. She is not quite sure what the future holds. Adiru and her seven siblings lost their father at a young age, and her mother has struggled to take care of the family.

"My aunt promised to pay my school fees since my mother did not have money. That is why I went to live with her. But when I got there, life was hard," Adiru narrates. Her aunt, who is a primary school teacher, also had three children to take care of so whenever Adiru needed money for basic school

requirements like books, pens, sanitary pads or undergarments, her aunt did not have it.

In 2018, Adiru met a 16-year-old boy who worked as a motorcycle mechanic at the nearby trading centre. He became her boyfriend. "He was good to me and would give me money to buy pads. Sometimes when we had no food at home, my boyfriend would provide money to buy food," Adiru says. Then one day, the boyfriend coerced Adiru into having unprotected sex and got her pregnant. "When my aunt learnt about it, she sent me away from her home and told me to go and get married to him. But I was too young and I knew I didn't want to get married yet," Adiru recounts.

Adiru was in Primary Six at the time, so she dropped out of school and returned to her mothers' home from where she gave birth and continues to live.

Adiru's story is just one of the millions of teen-age girls in Uganda who have had to drop out of school for similar reasons. Uganda has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates on the African continent, with 25% of girls becoming pregnant before the age of 19, according to the country's 2016 Demographic and Health survey. The high teenage pregnancy rates here are linked to a lack of sexual

and reproductive health education and services to young people, and poverty that forces young girls to engage in transactional sex for survival. For a long time, access to information and reproductive health services, including contraceptives to young people, has been a divisive issue, with conservative religious and cultural leaders putting up an intense fight against it. Sexual and reproductive health advocates say it could provide the best chance for Uganda to address its high teenage-pregnancy problem.

In recent years, conservatives have opposed a plan to introduce sex education into the school curriculum, arguing that it would encourage young people to start engaging in sex at an early age. Yet without addressing the existing gaps in knowledge, information and access to services, many young people are left at risk of pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. Young girls who end up becoming teen mothers also often face additional challenges navigating the transition from childhood to adulthood, including poverty, unemployment and lack of skills.

Since the lockdown and closure of schools in early 2020, Uganda has recorded increased cases of child sexual abuse, including defilement and child marriages. According to the Police Directorate of Criminal Investigations, at least 7,000 cases of defilement were registered between January and June 2020.

In the last one year, disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic have increased these vulnerabilities for many economically disadvantaged young women and girls and their families. To earn a living, after she had her baby, Adiru started selling vegetables in her neighbourhood to take care of her son and contribute to her family's welfare. But when the government imposed a lockdown across the country in 2020, the business came to a standstill.

"I would buy vegetables to sell but because there were few or no customers, they would get rotten and I made losses. I, therefore, decided to stay at home during the lock-

down. I just returned to business after the lockdown was eased," says Adiru. Although business is still slow, she says the money she earns from selling vegetables affords her son's milk every day. When she does not have money, her mother and older siblings also contribute to the family's upkeep. Sometimes though, Adiru also receives financial support from her son's father, especially when the child falls ill. But this support, she says, does not come regularly.

Adiru received the initial capital that kick-started her business after undergoing social survival and entrepreneurial training that targeted teen mothers in her community from a local organisation.

"They taught us several things like how to make liquid soap, and knitting baskets and mats," she says.

After the training, the group was also given a small capital to undertake any enterprise of their choice. That's when Adiru opted to start selling vegetables. She also bought a goat and saved the rest of the money.

She hopes to use that money saved to enroll for a tailoring course which costs Shs50,000. She needs about four months to learn the craft, she says.

"I have already spoken to someone who is willing to teach me. I just need to prepare myself to start the course and I know within a few months, I will have learnt what to do," states Adiru. For many teen mothers, employment choices are often limited due to a lack of diverse skill set, difficulty juggling motherhood, and low-paying jobs.

The challenge now for Adiru is finding money to buy a sewing machine.

"I hope that before the end of this year, I can own a machine and start making clothes for sale," she says.

**Names have been changed to protect the interviewee as a minor.*



A TEENAGE MOTHER'S EDUCATION INTERRUPTED BY COVID-19

Awekonimungu Esther* was looking forward to completing her primary education at the end of 2020. The coronavirus hit and the government closed all schools indefinitely, one of several preventive measures against the coronavirus.

"I was disappointed that schools were closed but I was also determined to continue learning. So, these days I attend classes twice a week through the radio," she states.

For Awekonimungu, this was not the first time her school attendance was disrupted. Awekonimungu who lives in the West Nile district of Nebbi is also a teenage mother. In 2018 while in primary six, Awekonimungu was sexually abused by her teacher who targeted her as a girl from a poor economic background struggling to get scholastic...

...materials and personal hygiene products. She got pregnant as a result.

The 18-year-old who comes from a family of eight says her father and step mother who are both farmers often struggled to provide her with basic school requirements like books, pens, sanitary pads and soap to wash her uniform.

"When I did not have pads and I was on my period, I would end up staying at home," Awekonimungu narrates.

Then one of the teachers at the school offered to help her. Although Awekonimungu was hesitant to take on the offer, the teacher insisted that he was just providing financial support because Awekonimungu was an academically promising student who needed to continue with her schooling without disruptions. "But after giving me money or buying me soap, he started demanding for sex from me. When I refused, he raped me," Awekonimungu explains.

When she discovered that she was pregnant and pointed to the teacher as being responsible, he fled the school and has never been arrested.

Despite rape and defilement being one of the most common sexual crimes committed against children in Uganda, with the annual Police crime report showing at least 13,613 defilement cases were reported in 2019 alone, perpetrators rarely get punished for their crimes.

The offenders who are usually people close or known to the victims bribe their way out by paying money to the families of the victims to avoid going to jail or being held accountable. That is what happened in the case of Awekonimungu.

After dropping out of school because of the pregnancy, Awekonimungu was sent away from home, forcing her to live with her grandmother for a period of time. But life there was a struggle as well as her grandmother did not have enough resources to take care of her granddaughter.

"My father later called me back to his home and this is where I gave birth from and have been living here since," she explains.

Despite the challenges of being a young mother, Awekonimungu was still interested in returning to school. When social workers from the Mentoring and Empowerment Programme for Young Women (MEMPROW) visited her village and held sensitization meetings with parents of girls who had dropped out of school because of pregnancy, they convinced Awekonimungu's father to return her to school, and he agreed.

Previously, the Ministry of Education policy required that pregnant girls be expelled from school with no readmission plan into the school system. However, in 2018 new guidelines were issued that allow retention and re-entry of girls into the formal school system after giving birth.

With this policy in place and the support from her family, Awekonimungu has been able to return to the same school after giving birth.

"I did not face any stigma when I returned to school and I was looking forward to

starting over again," she says.

In the several months she has spent at home since the lockdown and subsequent closure of schools, Awekonimungu has had ups and downs but says she has kept herself busy and up-to-date with school by taking weekly classes offered via radio. She also runs a small business selling silverfish and cassava in the market, from which she is able to raise money and take care of her personal needs while helping her family as well.

When she is not at the market, she sometimes takes up digging in people's gardens where she gets paid an average daily wage of Shs2,000. Awekonimungu is also a member of a child mothers' support group through which she is able to save some of the money she makes from the business. She says the group offers more than a platform for members to talk about investments and savings, it also provides therapy sessions and educational information on reproductive health.

"I have been able to save through this group but we also learn a lot from each other and share experiences. Now I know about family planning from this group," says Awekonimungu.

Awekonimungu is also concerned about her friends.

"Since schools closed, many of my classmates have become pregnant or have been married off. Majority had information on sexual reproductive health," she adds. With her son now living with his father (her former teacher), Awekonimungu says she now wants to focus on school and her business. Her dream is to complete primary school and thereafter undertake a vocational course in tailoring.

**Names have been changed to protect the interviewee as a minor.*



Sustaining Women's leadership

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC FORCED ONE WOMAN TO DIVERSIFY HER INCOME VENTURES



Florence Olema's healthy-looking goats bleat lazily under the tree shade in her compound. The goats are Olema's savings that she will soon exchange for a cow.

"The cow will then be used to plough the farm land," says Olema who recently decided to concentrate on farming for a living. Olema lives in Packwach, a town right on the banks of the Nile, in the West Nile region of Uganda.

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WOMEN'S RESILIENCE IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

INVAWG Uganda Biannual reporting: October 2020-March 2021.
Feminist Response to Exclusion and Gender Violence (FeRe)



Before she turned to farming as a full-time job, the 39-year-old mother of four used to distill and sell local alcoholic brew made from fermented sorghum and cassava. From the 12 litres, she earned about Shs100,000 weekly. It is this money that she then used to pay school fees for her children and also cover other household expenses. But with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, life became difficult for her as it did for the majority of people employed in the informal sector who are primarily women. Bars closed and any public gathering ban meant Olema couldn't make or sell her brew.

"We depend largely on people coming here and sitting around in groups to drink and entertain themselves. But when the government said no more public gatherings, I could not carry on with the business," she explains.

"I was stuck. That's why I went back into farming."

Agriculture remains a dominant source of livelihood for the majority of people in rural Uganda where Olema lives. Since the beginning of 2020, she has focused on cultivating food crops like cassava, simsim (sesame), groundnuts and cow-peas. However, extreme weather

events have led to losses. "We were able to harvest just a little for home consumption," Olema notes.

She is now pinning her hopes on the five acres of cassava that is still in the garden to make some income. But the cassava won't be harvested and sold until the next rains which start in late March.

"We are waiting for the rainy season because the cassava cuttings are also on high demand during this period as farmers are looking forward to getting new stock to plant," adds Olema.

Despite the few challenges so far, she is determined to make farming her main job. At the moment, her husband and teenage children who are out of school because of the coronavirus contribute the labour on the farm. But when she finally buys a cow, Olema is optimistic it will reduce the time it takes to plough the land. Like most parents of teenagers, Olema has to keep them busy in this prolonged school closure, which is challenging.

"That is why I had to send them to the farm which is quite a distance away from this home. There, they are able to concentrate on farming," she says.

"So many young girls have become pregnant and many have been married off during this period," she adds.

Olema is also the chairperson of a local cooperative and a member of a savings group that has been instrumental in providing credit to members in times of financial need. Members contribute Shs 5,000 to the savings group weekly. They can also borrow depending on how much they have contributed to the scheme and repay at a small interest rate. However, Olema says several members of the group have faced challenges repaying the loans because of reduced income since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. "Some people take out loans and at the end of the day paying becomes difficult. People have had to give up their property in exchange for loans," she states.

Although Olema has taken out credit from the group twice, she

says she was able to repay within the scheduled period of time.

Outside of farm work, Olema also earns a monthly salary of Shs 30,000 as a volunteer Village Health Team member. Village Health volunteers are respected members in different communities who are hired through the district health system to carry out public health information

from antenatal care advice to distributing anti-malaria treatment and de-worming tablets to children. Although Olema says being a village health volunteer provides her with extra income, restrictions on

social gatherings have disrupted her work since March 2020.

"As a Village Health Team member, I haven't been able to do much sensitization in the communities because of the risk of contracting coronavirus," she says.

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At the moment, her husband and teenage children who are out of school because of the coronavirus contribute the labour on the farm.

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WOMEN'S RESILIENCE

IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*A Publication by Mentoring and Empowerment
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