



صوتي SAUTI



● SAUTI صوتي

Sauti صوتي Publication is produced by the African Union Commission (AUC), through the Chairperson's Special Envoy on Youth in collaboration with the Women, Gender and Development Directorate with the generous support of the Forum for African Women Educationalists and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation.

African Union Commission

PO Box 3243 Roosevelt Street (Old Airport Area), W21K19,

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Website: www.au.int

Email: auyouthenvoy@africa-union.org

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The first Edition of **Sauti صوتي Publication** commemorates Beijing+25 of the United Nations and the Theme of the year the African Union on Silencing the Guns with focus on Youth Silencing the Guns Campaign and COVID-19 pandemic. It captures 25 contributions featuring the often untold and underrepresented stories of young women from across Africa and the diaspora showcasing their innovation, perspectives and impact in the community.





SILENCING
THE GUNS:
Creating Conducive Conditions
for Africa's Development

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY AFRICA CDC DIRECTOR	6
PREFACE BY AFRICAN UNION SPECIAL ENVOY ON YOUTH	8
INSPIRING QUOTES	10
OP-ED BY WOMEN, GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE	12
INTRODUCTION	14
AGENDA 2063	18
2020 VISION IS BLURRY	20
DROITS DES FEMMES VS. COVID-19	23
SAMMY'S KITCHEN	26
THE UNSUNG HEROINES	30
I WAS	34
CRAFTING A CONTEXT SPECIFIC MODEL TO ACHIEVE UHC IN AFRICA	38
LA CRISE DU CORONAVIRUS LES FEMMES TRAVAILLEUSES DANS LES MAQUIS ET LES RESTAURATRICES DE NUIT AUX ABOIS !	41
DES MAUX SANS MOTS	45
العنف المنزلي ضد المرأة أثناء الحجر الصحي	48
WOES OF AFRICAN FEMINISTS	54
THE DOMESTIC PANDEMIC	57
EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION MATCH	60
CE RUBAN VIOLET SUR LA PAILLE	64
THE ART OF BEING BRAVE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY	68
HAVENS FROM FEAR AND MARGINALIZATION	72
COVID-19 PANDEMIC ANOTHER INFILTRATING DEMISE ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE	75



SHECURES SANITARY PADS	80
HEALING: AN ENDLESS MAZE	84
TOO YOUNG TO SEE	86
لا للعنف ضد المرأة	89
BE STILL	90
UYI	92
VAA MASK, KOMESHA CORONA WEAR MASK, STOP COVID-19 SPREAD	94
WHEREVER THE WILDFLOWERS ARE	96
TO LIVE OR STAY	98
ABOUT THE AFRICAN UNION OFFICE OF THE YOUTH ENVOY	100
CLOSING NOTE	102

FOREWORD BY AFRICA CDC DIRECTOR





AFRICA CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (AFRICA CDC) DIRECTOR

Dr. JOHN NKENGASONG

The world is facing an unprecedented health, economic and social crisis due to COVID19 including the African continent. The situation in Africa is further exacerbated by limited health and economic infrastructures and existing social, political and environmental vulnerabilities.

The impact of COVID-19 on African women and girls is also enormous. Young women and girls in Africa continue to face structural, social, cultural and economic inequalities. The pandemic has added to the already existing structural injustices creating further challenges.

The World Health Organization indicates that by June 2020, women were accounting for around 40% of the COVID19 cases in Africa. This ranges from 35% in some countries to over 55% in others like South Africa. Besides, essential services such as access to sexual and reproductive health services in Africa have been heavily disrupted.

Besides, there has been an increase in the number of domestic violence cases since the pandemic began. In addition, women & girls are disproportionately affected due to inequities of access to information, prevention, and protection.

As our efforts at Africa CDC are focused on fighting the spread of COVID-19, we encourage member states to employ gender-sensitive approaches to their response to the pandemic. Member State processes that meaningfully engage young women and girls in responding to these issues are more relevant, effective and sustainable.

As individuals and member states, we all must adhere to the Joint Continental Strategy endorsed by Africa's Health Ministers in February 2020 that has enabled us to coordinate, collaborate and communicate. We must demonstrate a unity of purpose and work collectively to wage and win the war against COVID-19 especially in collaboration with Africa's youth through the African Youth Front on Coronavirus.

During the Virtual AU Youth Consultations Series on COVID-19, I called for building a youth-led movement against COVID-19 in Africa and encouraged young people to use it to sensitize the public and dispel false information and fake news. Young women and girls are already co-leaders at the forefront of this movement. Therefore, the Sauti صوتي Blog and publication, is an important platform to showcase young women and girls' leadership, resilience and stories on the frontline of the response to the pandemic.

The stories in this publication show how far we have come - but also how much more we need to get done for Africa's young women and girls to fulfill their potential. Let us do right by them.

PREFACE BY AU YOUTH ENVOY



AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION CHAIRPERSON'S SPECIAL ENVOY ON YOUTH

Ms. AYA CHEBBI

As young African feminists, we have believed that 2020 is the year for transformation for gender equality in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, yet, we were faced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed further political, social, digital and economic inequalities. The pandemic has exacerbated existing gender inequalities, erasing further stories, faces and voices of young women in Africa and the diaspora. Spaces for youth often omit the aspects of representativity, diversity and intersectionality for young African women.

That is why, my vision for the Sauti صوتي Project was to provide an alternative space that carries the feminist values of the African Union and changes the narrative because our struggle as young women is a struggle for voice. Sauti صوتي blog and publication is a platform to elevate and celebrate the resilience and innovation of young African women amid the "new normal" and further advocate for the issues that affect them everyday.

There are many harmful practices in our communities in Africa and multiple forms of gender based violence that patriarchy uses as a weapon to keep women and girls trapped in inequality. These practices are reinforced by a culture of blaming that often excludes young women, whose voices and stories are often erased and unnoticed. However, young African women have been leading with an iron fist, from the grassroots communities to the decision-making tables. In fact, African women have been fighting patriarchy for more than a century, fighting for social change, equality and democracy for decades with boldness and vision rooted in Pan-African values of ubuntu, solidarity and liberation.

As the African Union Special Envoy on Youth, I had the honor and opportunity to meet young women advocates and feminists across the continent who inspired me, and ignited the idea of Sauti صوتي. Their commitment is an affirmation that dismantling patriarchy is critical to achieve Agenda 2063 - The African We Want.

In this publication, the stories of young women depict the lived experiences of young women with their aspirations of an Africa where they can contribute to society and the economy, where they are empowered to be in leadership, to innovate and to live with dignity. This Africa is where the future is young and the future is female.

I am proud to introduce Sauti صوتي, the result of tireless

work of multiple stakeholders and partners. We acknowledge the valuable collaboration with the Women, Gender and Development Directorate, under the leadership of Ms. Leah Victoria Maloka with special thanks to Dr. Tapiwa Uchizi Nyasulu Rweyemamu. We are grateful for the generous support of the Forum for African Women Educationalists and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, particularly the focal points of the organizations respectively, Ms. Juliette Kimotho and Ms. Linda Weisert.

We appreciate the support from the African Union Commission Directorate of Information and Communication for guidance and disseminating relevant communication on the Sauti صوتي Project, particularly Ms. Janet Faith Adhiambo Ochieng, Ms. Doreen Apollos and Mr. Peter Kyambadde.

We also appreciate the Review Committee composed of representatives of the Women, Gender and Development Directorate, the Human Resources, Science and Technology Department, the Peace and Security Department as well as members of the AU Youth Advisory Council, for their time, guidance and significant efforts in the selection process of the 25 contributions.

We thank the Project Manager, Ms. Tindyebwa Ruth Aine, the Editorial Consultant, Ms. Rim Menia and the Publication Designer, Mr. Nathan C. Malilwe.

It is important to highlight this project is Youth-led and Africa-led; all members of the Sauti صوتي team are young Africans who contributed their creativity and skills to shaping this publication beautifully and creatively, for which we are grateful.

We also present our gratitude to the African young women from all over the continent and the diaspora who responded to the call for applications, for their efforts and time, and for sharing their inspiring stories and showcasing their potential.

The commission is grateful to those who provided support and guidance, in implementing this project. It is now upon different stakeholders to use Sauti صوتي as a powerful tool to amplify young women's voices and agency.

INSPIRING QUOTES



“ A world, society or community that is equal is one that is just. It is one that has potential, is inclusive and transformative. In our communities today, we lack some of these qualities. We must all work to foster an enabling policy, strategy, legislative and investment environment that recognizes and fosters young women and girls’ socio-economic participation.

The voices of girls and women are critical in this process. That is why “Sauti صوتي” Publication provides a unique platform to enhance the frontline work of young women as a crucial part of our frameworks and conversations. The African Union Commission will continue to work alongside Member States and other stakeholders to champion equity, equality and empowerment of women and girls ”

HE Amira Elfadil Mohammed Elfadil
Commissioner of Social Affairs African Union Commission





“ Young women and girls with digital literacy and personal development skills resonate with Agenda 2063 Aspirations and the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024. Young women can play a vital role in building the capacity of Member States to deliver youth oriented policies. The Sauti صوتي Publication truly reflects this vital role of young women in combating COVID-19 pandemic throughout our continent.

Young people can participate and lead continental dialogues and campaigns with young men as equal partners in addressing gender-based violence, but also in supporting gender mainstreaming in youth development interventions led by the relevant agencies of the African Union Commission ”

HE PROF Sarah Anyang Agbor
Commissioner of Human Resources, Science and Technology
African Union Commission

ENHANCING ADVOCACY FOR GENDER-RESPONSIVE RESPONSES TO COVID-19 IS OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY



Ms. Lehau Victoria Maloka

Acting Director - Women, Gender and Development Directorate African Union Commission

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has presented an unprecedented crisis that is heavily affecting livelihoods, the socio-economic stability and the security of many families and communities in Africa. The spread of the pandemic has equally disproportionately affected and posed multidimensional challenges to women and girls with such gender inequalities touted to have the potential to exacerbate the pandemic which would worsen if the responses did not incorporate gender analysis.

Holistically, at the continental level, the African Union Heads of State and Government under the leadership of H.E Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa and Chairperson of the African Union (AU) have mobilized a collective African response to COVID-19 and developed a continental strategy. H.E.

Moussa Faki Mahamat, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC) has led the operationalization of the strategy while extending support towards a more gendered and inclusive response to COVID-19 in Africa.

In furtherance of its mandate to promote gender equality in the work of the AUC and in response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa, the Women, Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD), the AUC entity responsible for promoting the integration of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) in the work of the Union, developed the [African Union Guidelines For Gender-Responsive Responses](#), a framework to enhance awareness on the impact of COVID-19 on GEWE and to provide guidelines for gender-responsive interventions to COVID-19 on the Continent.

It addresses the impact of the pandemic in different sectors, among others, the economy; food security and agriculture; healthcare; access to education; physical and psychological integrity; participation in decision-making; peace and security; legal protection; and access to information.

Through a series of multi-sectoral and inclusive stakeholder consultative meetings, WGDD has promoted the integration of GEWE and women's inclusion in COVID-19 responses. Among others a consultative meetings were held with the AUC Departments, the Bureau of the Specialized Technical Committee on GEWE, the AU Ministers in Charge of Gender and Women's Affairs; the AU Women Ministers of Foreign Affairs; the African Women Leaders Network; Civil Society Organizations as well as the with the AU Citizens through a robust experience and best practices sharing sessions and recommendations that have accumulated into Declarations to protect, promote and enhance gender equality and women empowerment in COVID-19 responses.

To complement the efforts, the AU Gender Online Reporting Platform developed by WGDD in 2019 was further updated with COVID-19 indicators to enable Member States and Regional Economic Communities to provide sex-disaggregated data on COVID-19 and their responses. Sex disaggregated data is important to improve response and recovery interventions and plans as the crisis progresses.

Further, to promote compliance and accountability for implementation of women's rights continental instruments, WGDD with the support of the Africa Leadership Forum (ALF) and Plan International (PI), developed the [Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index](#) (MPSI). The Scorecard and Index is an innovative contribution to the body of tools that

seek to enhance accountability and assess the progress by Member States in implementing gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment commitments under the Maputo Protocol. The framework serves as a monitoring and evaluation tool to protect women's rights during the COVID-19 emergency crises and also a recovery tool to ensure that women's rights are protected in the long run.

"Sauti صوتي" has brought to the fore the voices of young African feminists to be part of this crucial conversation and to draw attention to Young African Women's struggles, advocacy and achievements in fighting the global pandemic COVID19 and amplifying their voices and actions. This effort is meant to ensure that women and girls are not left behind in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

As highlighted in the final 25 informative contributions submitted by young African feminiss across the African continent and the diaspora is that since the lockdowns and movement restrictions in various countries, there are reports of increased domestic violence and other forms of Gender-Based Violence, including early child marriage. With children now homeschooling through the internet, there is also an increase in online sexual exploitation. All these require much vigilance from governments to ensure that women and girls are protected.

Indeed, the time is now for us to scale up our efforts, reinvigorate our commitments and raise once more, our voices, to say that even during COVID-19, our women and girls in Africa will not be left behind but rather be supported as a matter of urgency. Every response towards the prevention, containment, management and eradication of COVID-19 should take into account gender equality and women's empowerment.

● SAUTI صوتي PROJECT

“Sauti صوتي” means “Voice” in Arabic and Kiswahili

Africa Young Feminist Blog

first-ever young women blog of the African Union

The world has been battling against a pandemic that is claiming many lives across nations and distorting global trade, travel and economies. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has become a global emergency considering its effects on global growth. As the pandemic is further affecting employment, education and the mental health of African youth, we acknowledge that COVID-19 is also bringing to light the profound gender disparity in the various sectors.

The voice of young African feminists must be a crucial part of the conversation. Particularly, those who are caught in the digital divide. Rural and marginalized young women are mostly not connected and therefore miss out on the empowerment of the digital revolution. This exclusion also impacts the development field, as young women may not have the opportunities to communicate how COVID19 is affecting their realities, and alternative solutions to this pressing global challenge. In addition, the mainstream narrative portrays the challenges and achievements of women without a critical insight into the intersection of barriers they face.

Against this backdrop, “Sauti صوتي” aims to draw attention to Young African Women’s struggles, advocacy and achievements in fighting the global pandemic COVID19 and amplify their voices and actions.

The Sauti صوتي project was first launched during International Women’s Day 8 March 2020 followed by a re-launch in May adjusting to COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, calling for young women from across Africa and the diaspora to share their stories, in writing, visual, audio and videos.





The vision of the African Union Special Envoy on Youth Envoy, Ms. Aya Chebbi was to create a feminist space that is led by youth to elevate and celebrate their bold voices and often unrecognized work. This vision was translated into the first-ever blog of the African Union that ran in the month of July 2020 on the African Union Website au.int/en/sauti-blog

After a tight extensive selection process, a review committee vetted and selected **25 contributions**, to share their stories and expose their artistic potential and intellectual views under several themes, namely; Youth Silencing the Guns (**AU 2020 Theme of the Year**), Youth Refugee Voices (**AU 2019 Theme of the Year**), ending Violence Against Young Women, Employment and Education Match and Youth Health and Wellbeing as per **AU Youth Envoy 2019/20 Action Plan**.

The blog was then collected into this publication featuring 25 voices, often underrepresented and stories, often untold celebrating **Beijing+25** and showcasing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young African women across the continent and the diaspora from a gender lens while empowering young creatives and their artworks. The publication is now available online and distributed to African Union member states.

In addition to the aforementioned honors, each winner was awarded 200USD cash prize in order to support the selected young women financially for their creative work during the difficult circumstances of the Coronavirus outbreak.

The Sauti صوتي project was made possible in partnership with the Children's Investment Fund Foundation and the Forum for African Women Educationalists.

For the sustainability of the project, spearheaded by the African Union Office of the Youth Envoy in collaboration with the Women, Gender and Development Directorate, "**Sauti صوتي**" blog will run annually during the month of July. The blog will continue to have central focus on gender and youth while tackling trending themes and the AU Theme of Year. The blog will then be collected into a compendium as "**Sauti صوتي Publication**" that will be available in both digital and printed versions.

● SAUTI صوتي IN NUMBERS



APPLICATIONS

460 Applications received
50 Shortlisted contributions
25 Selected contribution



376 Writing
51 Audio/Video
33 Visual
44/55 countries in Africa
10 countries in diaspora



SELECTION

- 18 Writing
- 4 Audio/Video
- 3 Visual



25 contributors representing 23 countries in Africa and the diaspora

- 2 Diaspora
- 2 North
- 6 West
- 2 Central
- 4 East
- 7 Southern

Agenda 2063 is the blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future.

Agenda 2063 is Africa's strategic framework that aims to deliver on Africa's goal for inclusive and sustainable development and is a concrete manifestation of the pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity pursued under Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance.

Why Agenda 2063?

The need to envision a long-term 50 year development trajectory for Africa is important as Africa needs to revise and adapt its development agenda due to ongoing structural transformations; increased peace and reduction in the number of conflicts; renewed economic growth and social progress; the need for people centered development, gender equality and youth empowerment; changing global contexts such as increased globalisation and the ICT revolution; the increased unity of Africa which makes it a global power to be reckoned with and capable of rallying support around its own common agenda; and emerging development and investment opportunities in areas such as agri-business, infrastructure development, health and education as well as the value addition in African commodities

Agenda 2063 seeks to deliver on a common and shared set of 7 aspirations:

- Aspiration 1:** A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.
- Aspiration 2:** An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance.
- Aspiration 3:** An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law.
- Aspiration 4:** A peaceful and secure Africa.
- Aspiration 5:** An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics.
- Aspiration 6:** An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.
- Aspiration 7:** Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner. development.

Agenda 2063

The Africa we Want



The Vision and African Aspirations for Agenda 2063

Agenda 2063 is founded on the African Union (AU) Vision of "An Integrated, Prosperous, and Peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the International arena."

In addition to the various activities to be implemented at continental and Member State level, Agenda 2063 prioritises several flagship projects whose implementation is seen as key in accelerating Africa's growth.

Flagship Projects of Agenda 2063

AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA.

Creating One African Market

AFRICAN COMMODITIES STRATEGY.

Value Addition for Global Competitiveness

CYBER SECURITY.

SILENCING THE GUNS BY 2020.

Towards a Peaceful and Secure Africa

AFRICAN ECONOMIC PLATFORM.

Africa's Premier Business Forum

GREAT AFRICAN MUSEUM.

GRAND INGA DAM PROJECT.

Africa's Energy Powerhouse

PAN AFRICAN E-NETWORK.

Transforming Africa through Innovative Technology

AFRICAN FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

Accelerating Economic Integration

INTEGRATED HIGH SPEED TRAIN NETWORK.

Interconnecting Africa

AFRICAN PASSPORT.

Free movement of Persons in Africa

AFRICAN VIRTUAL & E-UNIVERSITY.

Increasing Access to Higher Education

SINGLE AFRICAN AIR TRANSPORT MARKET.

Towards One African sky

AFRICA OUTER SPACE STRATEGY.

Harnessing Space Technology for Development

Find out more about the AU and Agenda 2063 by visiting

www.au.africa

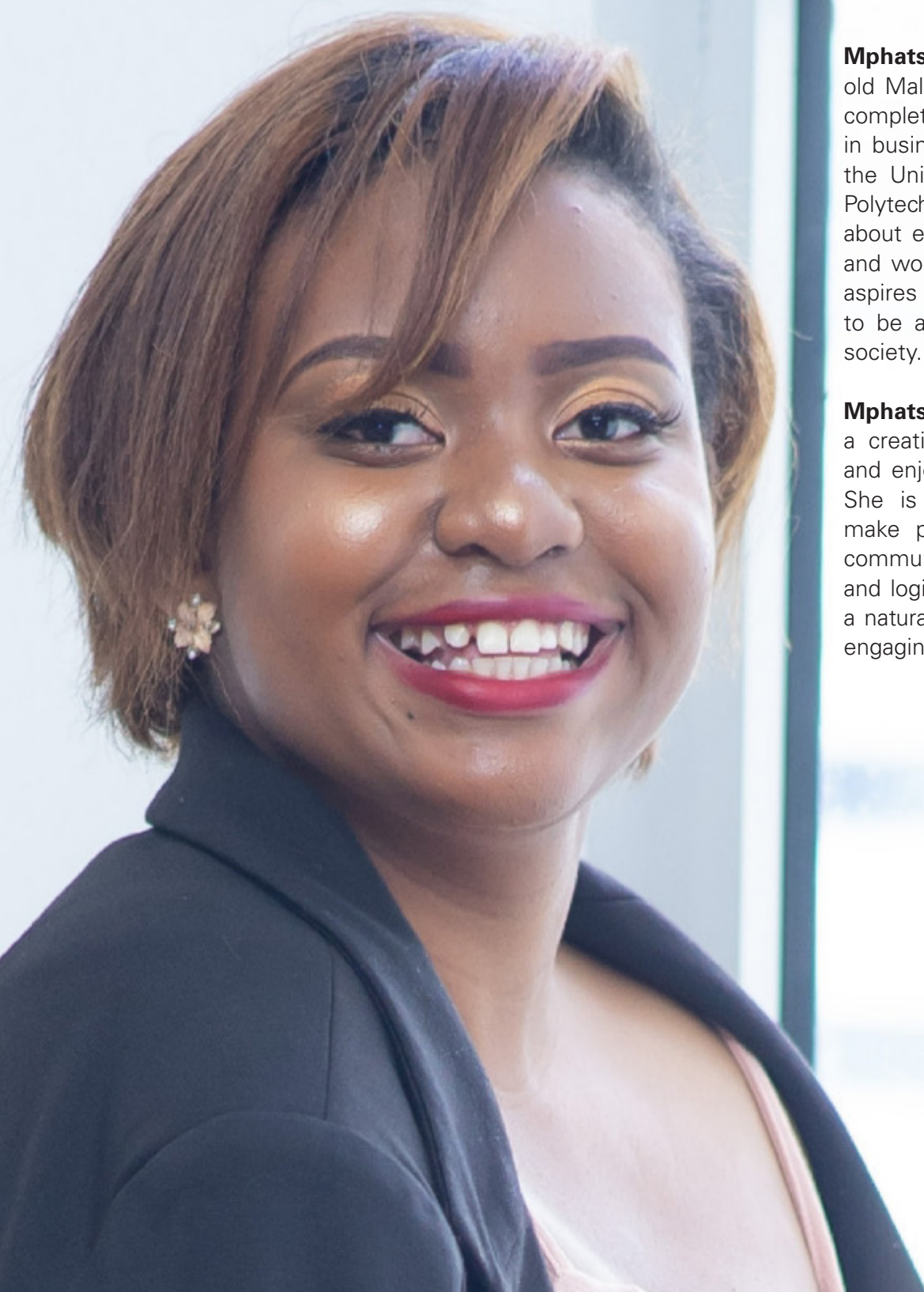


Prosperity, Integration,
democracy, Peace, Common
Heritage, People Driven &
Global Influence is
what we **ASPIRE!**

Find out more at
www.au.africa/agenda2063

2020

VISION IS BLURRY



Mphatso Mzandu is a 21-years old Malawian. She has recently completed her Bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Malawi - The Polytechnic. She is passionate about entrepreneurship, fashion and women empowerment and aspires to use her knowledge to be a significant influence in society.

Mphatso considers herself as a creative and artistic at heart and enjoys different arts forms. She is idealistic and aims to make positive changes in her community. She is both intuitive and logical. Mphatso Mzandu is a natural empathetic and enjoys engaging in dialogue.

The world has been talking about 2020 in the last decade or so for as long as we could remember. For a while, it felt so far away but on December 31, 2019, at exactly midnight we popped our fireworks and screamed Happy New Year truly hoping that it would be so.

This was supposed to be the year for dreams to come true and hopes of the future to be made, the Olympics that unite us every 4 years and the United States are supposed to have their presidential elections that affect the global economy at large and as for a 21-years old Malawian young woman like me, this was the year I was going to graduate college, the start of a new decade of my life, the decade I build my story, my career and possibly start a family of my own.

When news broke out of the first COVID-19 case in Malawi I was sitting for my final college examinations and the president of the country had declared a state of emergency and one of

the preventive measures was that all schools be closed but I was lucky enough to have finished my exams before my university closed. For so many of us, this pandemic has disrupted our education. As young people, we constantly experience the pressure of becoming more but now we are facing uncertainty on top of that and it is quite mind baffling.

We all know the saying “when you educate a girl child, you educate a nation” and in these uncertain and quite chaotic times, it is important to not forget her. Education is for so many of us success, security, stability and even a mere option for others but for a majority of young African women, especially those living in rural and marginalized areas, it is freedom in its literal meaning. It is no secret that a majority of African norms and cultural practices are dominantly shaped against the girl child from female genital mutilation to sexual initiation rituals and early child marriages as well as beliefs that strip widows of their late husband’s property.



©World Bank Photo Collection

Education gives these young women awareness of the harms these practices have on their well-being and it allows them to know that they have a choice, a say in their lives as well as providing the opportunity for them to become independent and escape these harsh realities in their particular communities. Knowledge reminds women that we are not subhuman, it gives us awareness of our beauty, significance, abilities and power, and it empowers us and allows us space to unapologetically be ourselves.

I recall watching the Miss Universe 2019 pageant and when the winner Miss South Africa, Zozibini Tunzi was asked about the most important thing we should teach young girls today, she responded "I think the most important thing we should be teaching young girls today is leadership." She continued to explain on how society has labeled women to be and how it has been a barrier to achieving that and she concluded by encouraging young girls to take up space in society. In that moment I didn't believe anyone was more deserving of the crown. She stood up for us in the most graceful and powerful way.

As one of my role models, COO of Facebook Sheryl Sandberg says in her book *Lean In; Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* that "we can reignite the revolution by internalizing the revolution. The shift to a more equal world will happen person by person. We move closer to the larger goal of true equality with each woman who leans in." She explained that when women take up leadership roles they are able to pave the way for other women as well as tear down external barriers that are hindering women from succeeding and this is true even for these African cultural

practices that treat women like subhumans, that deny us our basic rights and brainwash us to believe that we were merely created to satisfy a man. Indeed, knowledge is power and education is how women can take up these leadership roles in different fields, speak up and make significant changes in our societies.

However, during this pandemic, as physical gatherings have been banned to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, a majority of institutions have resorted to online learning as a way to preserve education but this circumstance has exposed the digital divide between different classes of society, while learning has continued for some, it has completely stopped for people with no access to the internet, computers or smartphones and who lack the knowledge on how to use these resources. In these uncertain times this has resulted to early child marriages, which also leads to early pregnancies and increased rate in school dropouts.

This is a wakeup call for us to strive for our societies to meet the rest of the world as it is advancing in technology. It is important to find strategic ways to preserve learning for those who are not afforded the same access to technology and whether that means provision of reusable masks and hand sanitizers to students, distribution of books and food stuffs or distancing of desks in classrooms as well as the inclusion of information technology as a compulsory subject in public schools. The hope of a brighter Africa is determined by how well the youth are equipped with the skills needed to develop it. The vision is not gone; it might be blurry but we can still see and it is still possible. ■

A portrait of Manuella Kati Koné, a young Black woman with short dark hair, wearing a white button-down shirt. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. Her arms are crossed, and she is wearing several beaded bracelets on her left wrist. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

DROITS DES FEMMES VS. COVID-19

Manuella Kati Koné is a blogger and author from Côte d'Ivoire. She has a degree in Public Law, Mention: Contemporary Worlds.

Manuella is a very passionate person with a vivid imagination. She also has a great sense of observation and determination.

«On considère que ce n'est pas le coronavirus qui doit faire peur, mais la pandémie patriarcale qui viole toutes les sept minutes une femme, qui assassine une femme toutes les 48 heures, qui justifie les discriminations et les violences sexistes» avait déclaré Sophia Antoine, membre du mouvement Femen lors d'une manifestation pour la journée des femmes qui s'est tenue le 8 mars dernier. Le mot d'ordre est donc clair pour toutes les féministes du monde dont celles du continent africain: la lutte pour l'égalité des sexes continue aujourd'hui plus que jamais.

Alors que 2020 était censée être une année prometteuse en matière des droits des femmes, l'horizon s'est brusquement assombri. Nonobstant le fait que nous ne devrions plus plancher sur le problème de l'égalité des sexes en ce XXI^{ème} siècle, ce dossier continue de faire l'actualité. Par ailleurs, comme nous le savons, l'histoire nous a démontré à maintes reprises que les crises, quelles que soient leurs formes, n'ont jamais été en faveur des femmes car celles-ci sont les plus exposées physiquement et économiquement. Par conséquent, cette crise du Covid-19 ne demeure pas en reste de cette assertion.

En ce qui concerne cette crise sanitaire inédite, les données prévisionnelles ont, tout de suite, été très inquiétantes. Celles-ci se sont manifestées avec cette période de confinement au cours de ces derniers mois. Ainsi, on a pu malheureusement dénoter une recrudescence des violences faites aux femmes, des mutilations génitales et des mariages forcés. Il ne fait aucun doute que la vie, bien que ralentie, continue et ce, même dans les manquements en matière de droits des femmes.

De ce fait, même si le contexte actuel ne facilite pas les choses, l'Union Africaine (UA) dans sa volonté de booster le respect des droits des femmes a maintenu le cap de la lutte. En son aspiration 6 de son Agenda 2063, la stratégie pour l'égalité des sexes et l'autonomisation des femmes est nette et claire.

De plus, l'Union Africaine a compris que les bras armés pour réussir cette stratégie ne sont autres que les différentes associations de femmes. Les féministes sont montées au créneau afin de soutenir les stratégies mises en œuvre. Leurs actions, bien que mises à mal par cette situation inédite, n'en demeurent pas moins importantes.

Elles ont compris qu'il ne fallait pas se reposer sur leurs lauriers car les progrès précédemment faits pourraient être perdus. Les associations féministes se rapprochent de plus en plus pour donner plus de répercussion à leurs voix. On note alors une montée en puissance des mouvements féministes. L'impact de ces mouvements est visible sur plusieurs axes. L'objectif est de mettre fin aux violences contre les femmes. Le respect des droits des femmes passe alors par une autonomisation de la femme et une campagne de sensibilisation contre ces violences durant cette période de pandémie.

Une campagne ardue contre les violences faites aux femmes

Mariages d'enfants, mutilations sexuelles, violences conjugales, etc. sont loin d'être maîtrisés. Bien que le covid-19 ait eu des conséquences néfastes et avait eu tendance à démoraliser les troupes, il n'en demeure pas moins qu'il eut des avancées. Une des notes positives en ce qui concerne la lutte contre les mutilations génitales est la criminalisation de la pratique de l'excision au Soudan qui était un fervent élève de cette pratique crapuleuse.

Ces mutilations qui sont considérées comme une preuve flagrante des discriminations de genres. En plus de l'Union Africaine, les autorités au niveaux nationaux doivent mettre également les mains à la pâte. Ils doivent alors lutter pour maintenir les services aux produits et informations essentiels en matière de santé sexuelle et reproductive pendant la pandémie, parce qu'une interruption de ces services pourrait être catastrophique en ce qui concerne la condition de la femme.

Durant cette période, les violences conjugales ont beaucoup fait parler d'elles, dans la mesure où elles ont exponentiellement augmenté de 30%. Ces violences ont même parfois noirci le tableau des faits divers. Pour s'insurger contre ces faits, une campagne ardue a été menée sur le terrain ou parfois par le biais des réseaux sociaux, et les féministes y étaient très actives. Mais également, on note un déploiement dans le monde rural afin qu'une tranche de la population féminine n'ayant pas accès aux nouvelles technologies, ne se trouve pas délaissée dans cette lutte.

De plus, les femmes veulent être de plus en plus présentes au sein des sphères de décision qui demeurent majoritairement masculines. Il ne fait aucun doute dans l'esprit des mouvements féministes en grand ou petit noyau, qu'il n'y a qu'en étant partie active aux prises de décision que les choses changeront.

Ce qui est une réalité incontestable car les tenants de l'hémicycle ont plus tendance à minimiser l'impact de cette pandémie sur la gente féminine. Mettant de côté ce laisser-aller en matière de droit des femmes, toutes les décisions prises durant cet état d'urgence devraient donc associer des mesures de respect des droits de femmes dont celui de ne pas subir de violence. L'exposition physique étant ainsi démontrée, les femmes sont aussi exposées économiquement.

Une autonomisation de la femme plus que nécessaire

Les prévisions économiques ne sont pas reluisantes car le Covid-19 a eu un véritable impact sur l'activité économique. Par conséquent, le monde devrait faire face à une crise économique sans précédent. Ces prévisions sont encore plus inquiétantes pour le continent africain, l'un des plus pauvres continents où la plupart de l'activité économique repose sur l'informel et où nous devons nous préparer à cette éventuelle crise.

Les femmes étant des membres actives de ce secteur, pour avoir été déclarées championnes de l'entrepreneuriat en Afrique, elles sont alors directement concernées par ces suspicions de faillite

monétaire. Ainsi, un maintien des aides pour soutenir leur activité doit être mis en œuvre car celles-ci peuvent se retrouver rapidement privées de la manne financière. Le financement de la mobilisation pour les droits des femmes doit considérablement être augmenté, au lieu d'être réduit. Par ailleurs, cette autonomisation passe par l'éducation de la jeune fille. Ce volet continue de souffrir.

Qui dit éducation, dit préparation pour les défis de demain dont celui de la participation au domaine économique. Une fille instruite est une valeur sûre pour l'économie d'un pays.

L'autonomisation de la femme paraît donc plus que nécessaire dans ce contexte délétère. Ceci passe également par la préservation des carrières de la jeune fille qui risquerait de ne jamais se remettre de la crise du Covid-19 selon Sarah Fielding dans un article du journal féminin InStyle. Ce problème étant interdépendant à celui de la scolarisation. Un doigt rigoureux doit être mis sur la scolarisation de la jeune fille. Une femme dans la misère est encore plus exposée à tous les vices et sévices. Lutter contre la pauvreté de cette tranche de la population serait une bonne stratégie pour l'endiguer.

Grâce à la pleine mobilisation des associations des femmes, nous avons compris qu'il ne fallait pas reléguer au second plan, la lutte pour l'égalité des sexes car celle-ci vacille en ce moment. Il est alors important de garder la détermination et redoubler d'efforts pour maintenir les avancées durement acquises. Et sur ce point, les féministes africaines font leur part.



SAMMY'S KITCHEN

Daina Mandewo is a 23-years old final year medical student from Zimbabwe. She is passionate about global health and ensuring equitable access to healthcare for everyone. Her ultimate dream is to work for the World Health Organization. She is a volunteer at Open Tribe School providing psychosocial support for a group of adolescents living with HIV/AIDS in southern Africa.

Daina considers herself as a humorous person and believes that she could have made a career out of stand up comedy. She loves writing as it helps her to gather her thoughts and express herself. And she has published her first story when she was 10-years old in a local newspaper.



Of Love and Ticking Time Bombs

14 February 2020

While the world celebrated love and mushy feelings, the first COVID-19 case was recorded in Egypt, making it the first case on the African continent. Immediately, the media was awash with aghast and worrisome reports of what the pandemic would mean for Africa. “A ticking time bomb” is what experts called it. All these gruesome predictions were not necessarily unfounded, regarding our overburdened healthcare facilities and already struggling economies. Challenges ubiquitous in the continent would only confound the devastation. For example, what would happen to those in crowded living conditions without reliable access to clean water, and not in the very least, how were most families going to afford a meal?

Of Lockdowns and Invisible Hands

30 March 2020

There were mixed feelings when the nationwide lockdown was announced in Zimbabwe. On one hand, it made sense in curbing infection spread whilst buying authorities time to map a way forward. On the other hand, there were concerns over what it would mean for our economy, which, already vexed by its own issues, was on life support. Would we be able to resuscitate it after the pandemic, or the already fallen giant would finally breathe its last? Those were the two major hands whose members supported their respective stance quite vehemently in emotionally charged posts that made waves on social media. Perhaps that is what made the third hand invisible. I also would not have acknowledged its existence had it not been for the shoe cobbler who works just outside our house, and the fateful afternoon before lockdown where I happened to be passing his stall as he told his colleague, “I don’t think I can afford to feed my family after the first week of this lockdown.” We are now in Week 8.

No prizes for guessing what the third hand is, but in case you are still trying to figure it out: it’s hunger.

Of Livelihoods and Last Meals

Zimbabwe has the second biggest informal economy as a share of its economy, contributing about 60.6% to the overall GDP. Most people do not have a basic salary and rely on informal trade to put food on the table. The COVID-19 pandemic could not have come at a worse time for the country; in December 2019 the World Food Programme announced that Zimbabwe was facing its worst hunger crisis in 10 years, with half of the population –over 7 million people– categorized as food insecure.

Of Lawyers and Communities

Meet Samantha Murozoki. I call her Sammy because she is my friend so I guess you can call her that too. Sammy is a Zimbabwean immigration lawyer who was working in South Africa but came home just before the nationwide lockdown. Moved by the plight of mothers in her community who confided of their struggles to feed their children, Sammy decided to start a relief kitchen from her house to make sure that families in her community ate at least once a day.



© Daina Mandewo



Of Jeans and Beans

Sammy started her kitchen with 2kg of rice and 500g of beans that served 24 people. Since that first meal, the number of people doubled the next day to 48, and then exponentially to over thousands in the space of 30 days. At some point, she even had to barter her jeans and sneakers for food supplies. Her mantra was that no one would be turned away.

Every morning, maize porridge with peanut butter is served to hundreds of children who

wait eagerly in winding queues to be served in lunchboxes, plates and cups carried from their homes. And every evening, supper is served to struggling Chitungwiza residents who depend on Sammy's kitchen for their daily sustenance. Observing social distancing rules such as sanitizing everyone, serving only one person at a time, and making masks a prerequisite for everyone coming to the kitchen, Sammy has made sure that accessing food is not only free but safe.



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Of Social Media and Silent epidemics

News about the impact Sammy was having in fighting hunger; a silent epidemic in the populous township of Chitungwiza, spread like wildfire on social media. Corporates and individuals around Zimbabwe rallied behind her efforts by making food donations and monetary contributions to ensure the relief kitchen continues. Her noble endeavor has been celebrated as valiant by many.

Of Women and Pandemics

Forbes has recently released an article highlighting that the countries that have had quite notable successes in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic are led by women. The United States Bureau of Labor statistics estimated that 80% of healthcare workers are women. As humanity faces its darkest hour in this pandemic whose devastation to spheres of being has been pegged as worse than the World Wars, our frontline is literally mostly women.

We find ourselves in a bitter albeit opportune moment to rewrite history. It sucks that it had to take a pandemic for us to realize the power that women have, but since we are here, I guess that it is just as good starting point as any.

Africa celebrates her daughters who, like Sammy, are helping their communities to survive within this pandemic in their own way. To the women who are sharing their meals with a neighbor, to the young women who are helping to bring valid information about the pandemic to remote areas, to the young women who are volunteering at shelters that are helping victims of gender-based violence, and to those who will work tirelessly to read, edit, compile and translate all these stories: thank you!

And to whoever is reading this, I hope Sammy's story encourages you that though humanity is facing its toughest fight yet, we can all find optimism and light in the tenacity of the human spirit. Even in the pits of lack, hunger and strife, generosity can still shine through.

A young woman has single-handedly proven that to a whole country.

THE UNSUNG HEROINES



Hellen Awuor Okelo is a Kenyan writer living in Rwanda. She is a student at the African Leadership University, majoring in finance, economics and marketing. Hellen is passionate about women empowerment and environmental conservation. She carries the responsibility of mentoring young girls after witnessing many cases of early pregnancies and child marriages when growing up.

Hellen Awuor Okeli considers herself as a big dreamer and creative. She is a workaholic and has many talents including singing, writing, modelling and reading. She was a victim of bullying in her early years in life

M

arch 14th, 2020 was like any other other day; bright sunshine and regular activities, except for the utterly distressing outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The escalation was fast, and as I made my way to school, anxiety had taken the better part of me. Could it be worse? Oh, yes. News about the first case in the country were reported soon after. As an international student, I knew that the safest option was to go home.

"I'm a big girl, I told myself, and what is the point if I have a job and my rent for the next three months was paid", call it proactivity. Without regret, I stayed behind, which marks the genesis of my discovery, my appreciation for small things, and, most importantly, for the role of women in society.

"The country is undergoing a total lockdown. Anyone caught defying lockdown rules will face the law," the news headlines read. For the first time, I did not think about myself. I thought of those with nothing, yet they had children to feed. I thought about those without proper shelters or clean water, I thought of many who would lose their jobs, including me, because one month later, I lost it. Days later. I decided to check what was happening outside. Despite the sickening silence, the storefronts, devoid of displays, and cars sitting empty along the curb and collecting dust, I could spot several women.

The majority were middle-aged, with merchandise on their heads and young ones tied to their backs. Most sold foods, including bananas, onions, avocados, and green vegetables to get some income. I was not interested in buying anything, but when a young woman pleaded

me to buy some hand picked mushrooms, I did buy, forgetting that I don't know how to cook them. Many women have sought various ways to generate income during this period, enduring the hot sun and risking their own lives. I cannot help but concluding that women stand stronger when tough times strike.

No word can describe the determination of a woman who wants to feed her children and no dangers threaten them at that point, not even the fear of being arrested.

I am a typical youth, a social media addict. Viewing memes and funny videos is perhaps my favorite pastime activity. However, this time around, most of my friends and I are busy running sanitary towels donation projects and posting emergency helplines. I can, therefore, say that I have a change of hobby. As much as the lack of sanitary pads might appear like "a silent problem," it is hard to ignore the high undocumented increase in numbers of affected women. Let's break it down further. Most low-income families in Africa earn below \$2 a day. One packet of sanitary towels costs \$1, meaning that it is beyond their capability.

For teenagers, their academics are likely to be affected. Worse, they could seek help from a sexual partner and end up with unwanted pregnancies. Recently, I called a gas service person, and somehow as he fixed my gas, he told me about his likely frustration of not being able to provide his 17-years-old sister with sanitary pads. He wasn't as direct, but I am fast at connecting dots. He is 19, an orphan, and the breadwinner of his family. I stepped in to help because I am a woman, and I entirely relate.

There is a common statement going viral in social media saying that “we all know tampons and pads are super expensive. Still, the most wholesome part of life is that I have never met someone who wasn’t willing to give you one when you needed it.” To every woman supporting another, you are a hero!

Before my roommate left for Kenya, I remember her saying, “there is a likelihood that domestic violence cases might increase. Imagine sharing a roof with a violent partner for 24 hours every day. By now, it’s quite apparent. News headlines of increased domestic violence and rape cases are widespread. There are incest cases, and well, what about police officers raping women who are late for home when

curfew hours start? When we say that women should stand for their rights, we do not mean posting it on social media, then leaving it at that.

When we say that women should check on one another, we do not mean getting the “I’m fine” answer and leaving it at that, instead, we mean checking if she is really fine.” Again, many unsung heroines are currently addressing these issues. Who are they? They include the many landlords who have given desperate women free housing, there have been food donations by women-run initiatives, and heroic moments like the female police officer who was recognized for her selfless act of helping a woman with a baby and heavy luggage beat.



She warmed the hearts of many Kenyans and proved that humanity still exists. This comes in a time when the Kenyan police force is under criticism of maltreating the citizens, leaving many with injuries. Let's talk about cyberbullying and body shaming. Perhaps you are thinking that these are just memes, or that this is just for fun. If something wrong is not corrected as soon as it occurs, it soon turns out to be right. You might have come across statements like "The a** won again, now that faces are covered in masks." Body-shaming starts from simple statements like this. I honestly find them disrespectful and frequently address them immediately. It is our responsibility to create a better society because we are more than just our bodies or looks. Honestly I appreciate all the women who have played a role in

correcting gender stereotypes in social media and preventing the cyberbullying of women during this period.

To all women, we are strong and we run society. May you thrive in whatever you do and remember that you are a heroine. The unsung heroines in this uncertain period are the mothers, the sisters, you and I !



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A black and white portrait of a young woman with short, dark, curly hair. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. She is wearing a dark, ribbed turtleneck sweater. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a building with windows.

I WAS . . .

Ruvimbo Musiyarira is a 25 years old Zimbabwean. She is an international relations graduate and currently pursuing a Master degree in public management and policy at the University of Pretoria. She is an academic tutor in public administration and also works as a photographer and writer for her university. Ruvimbo is passionate about education and women's rights and strives to do her part in eradicating corruption in Africa.

Ruvimbo loves music, singing, travelling and experiencing different cultures. She is passionate about ethics and loves everything related to the African continent.

I was 5 the first time I felt a man's hand on my body...
The first time I put my tiny hand on a man's body
While my other hand gripped onto my teddy bear.

I knew it was wrong,
I don't think I knew why it was wrong,
But it was wrong.

He was so tall, I was 5.
But I knew he wasn't supposed to touch me.
It felt wrong. But he had my best interests at heart.

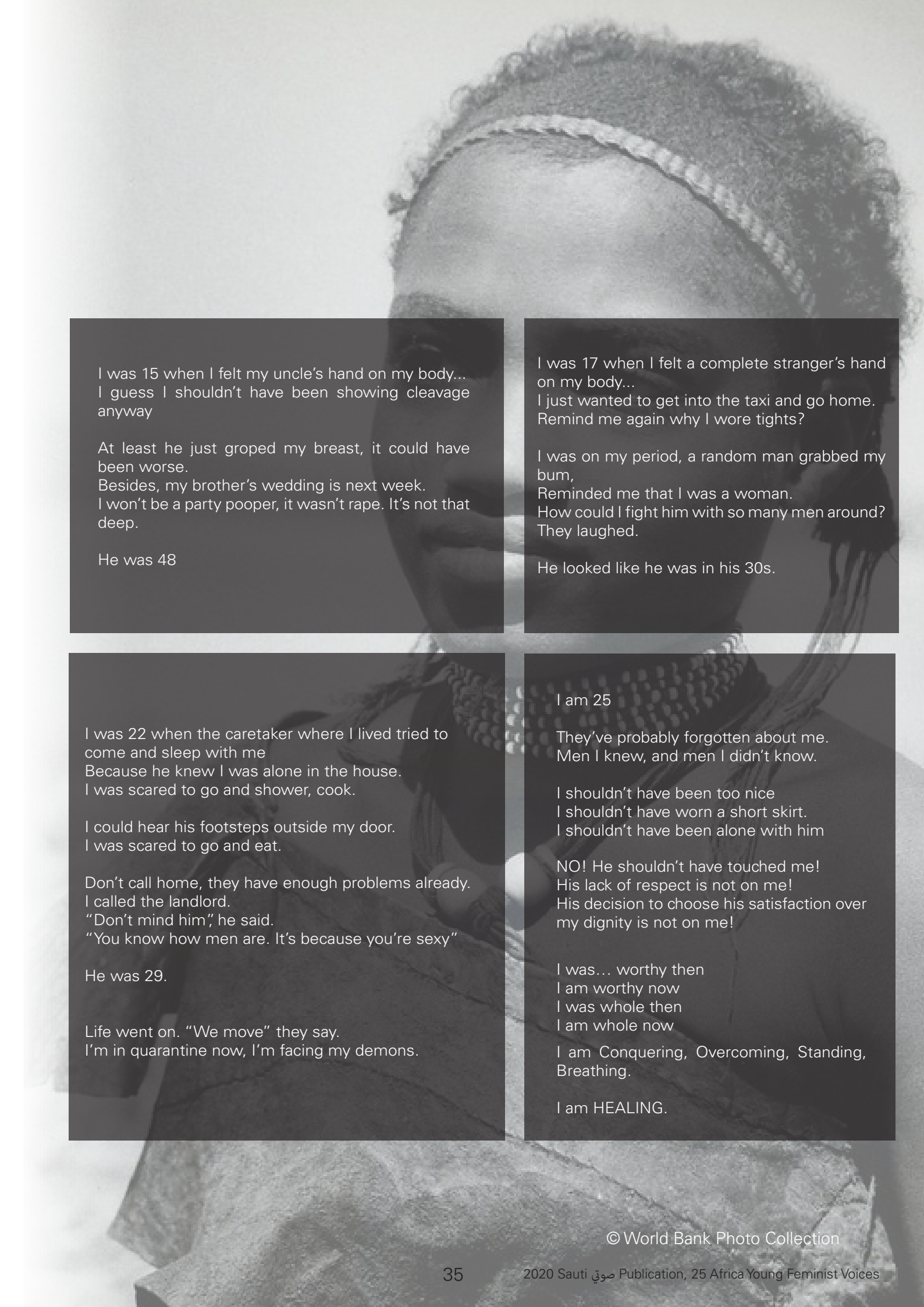
He wouldn't hurt me. He's my cousin.

He was 17.

12. That's how old I was the second time I felt a man's
hand on my body...
It made me uncomfortable. He was my teacher
It was just a cosy hug, I guess and a hand between my
thighs.

I should have done my homework, I wouldn't have
needed to stay in class during break.
My bottle green uniform skirt shouldn't have been
above my knees anyway,
The school rules say so.

He was 40.



I was 15 when I felt my uncle's hand on my body...
I guess I shouldn't have been showing cleavage
anyway

At least he just groped my breast, it could have
been worse.
Besides, my brother's wedding is next week.
I won't be a party pooper, it wasn't rape. It's not that
deep.

He was 48

I was 17 when I felt a complete stranger's hand
on my body...
I just wanted to get into the taxi and go home.
Remind me again why I wore tights?

I was on my period, a random man grabbed my
bum,
Reminded me that I was a woman.
How could I fight him with so many men around?
They laughed.

He looked like he was in his 30s.

I was 22 when the caretaker where I lived tried to
come and sleep with me
Because he knew I was alone in the house.
I was scared to go and shower, cook.

I could hear his footsteps outside my door.
I was scared to go and eat.

Don't call home, they have enough problems already.
I called the landlord.
"Don't mind him," he said.
"You know how men are. It's because you're sexy"

He was 29.

Life went on. "We move" they say.
I'm in quarantine now, I'm facing my demons.

I am 25

They've probably forgotten about me.
Men I knew, and men I didn't know.

I shouldn't have been too nice
I shouldn't have worn a short skirt.
I shouldn't have been alone with him

NO! He shouldn't have touched me!
His lack of respect is not on me!
His decision to choose his satisfaction over
my dignity is not on me!

I was... worthy then
I am worthy now
I was whole then
I am whole now

I am Conquering, Overcoming, Standing,
Breathing.

I am HEALING.



“ Je voudrais aider à construire un monde dans lequel chaque femme ou chaque jeune fille pourra créer le mode de vie qu'elle souhaite adopter, sans être marginalisée. Je suis convaincue qu'une société dans laquelle les femmes ne sont pas marginalisées sur le plan socio-économique sera une société plus juste, plus solidaire et plus prospère. Une société avec des initiatives, à l'instar de Sauti صوتي qui amplifient la voix des femmes ”

Hon. Amina Priscille Longoh
Ministre de la Femme et de la Protection de la Petite Enfance, Tchad



“ Over and over again, women in leadership have demonstrated that they are better at running the world. Let us be them and let us support them. The world needs unabated female leaders now more than ever, and the Sauti صوتي publication is the platform for such leaders ”

Hon. Emma Theofelus
Deputy Minister of Information, Communication and Technology, Namibia

CRAFTING A CONTEXT SPECIFIC MODEL

TO ACHIEVE UHC IN AFRICA



Anna Mary Nakitto is a Ugandan biomedical laboratory technologist with over 5 years experience. She is currently working with the Emergency Center of Excellence in Paediatric Surgery in Entebbe, Uganda. **Anna** graduated from Makerere University with a Bachelor's degree and is currently pursuing a Master in public health from the University of South Wales, UK.

Anna considers herself as a flexible and awfully optimistic person with high self-esteem. She also has a strong desire to continually build her skills set and expertise with an all-round attitude.



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Introduction

Whereas the idea of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is relatively new, the ideals it espouses are not. These ideals take on a comprehensive approach towards health and include disease prevention, effective treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care.¹ In realizing this, out-of-pocket expenditure ought to be minimized so that the vulnerable are not further impoverished, which may exacerbate their precarious circumstances. But how do these lofty aspirations translate into tangible benefits for Africa's vulnerable adolescents, especially women and girls?

Diagnosing the Problem

Africa, for the better part of its known history, has been synonymous with disease. While there has been no shortage of grim images and commentary on its epidemics, there is a dearth of solid and disaggregated data on the extent of its disease burden and related healthcare challenges. It is therefore incumbent upon governments to gather empirical data on the prevalence of various epidemics such as Ebola and the new Covid-19, protracted challenges like malaria and HIV, the entire spectrum of sexual and reproductive health rights, and more importantly, the less prioritized areas of mental health and disability rights. It is only by grasping the full extent of the challenge at hand that an appropriate response can be designed.

Borrowing from Women's Groups

One of the under reported success stories in Africa is the role of informal women's savings groups in mitigating poverty and vulnerability.² In these groups, women pool their individual savings and in turn are allowed to borrow up to four times the amount they have in savings. It is generally expected that they will invest this money in a profitable venture like farming or trade. However, there are instances where funds can be also availed to a member in the event that they are struck by a contingency such as household health emergencies.³

Armed with empirical data on the prevalent health challenges facing various communities, a community-based health insurance scheme can then be designed using the success of women's savings groups as a blueprint. The beauty with such an approach is that it enables the states to avail resources to the various communities in line with their bigger burdens. For instance, in communities where child marriage is an entrenched culture, the states' focus would be on equipping local health facilities to handle sexual and reproductive health challenges like obstetric fistula, pre and post-natal management, among others.⁴

1. Stuckler D, et.al, The Political Economy of Universal Health Coverage, Background Paper for the Global Symposium on Health Systems Research, Switzerland, 2010, page 11.

2. Murungi R, How Savings Circles Empower Women in Rural Africa, World Economic Forum, 2019. Available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/savings-empower-women-rural-africa-world-relief/>. Accessed on May 25, 2020 at 12:45PM.

Similarly, communities emerging from conflict should have their local health facilities empowered to address disability rights and mental health challenges. Epidemic prone communities like those residing along national borders should have health facilities capable of isolating, testing and treating suspected cases. The community-based health insurance scheme would then fill in systemic gaps that often impede access to those health facilities such as provision of reliable transportation for all, case follow up, subsidizing the cost of treatments that fall outside the government provisions and other interventions.

It goes without saying that this proposed approach is not a call to subsidize the government's healthcare budget. Rather, it draws upon the collective power of local communities to plug the inevitable gaps in government interventions regarding the community's most prevalent challenges such that every member in need can be adequately taken care of.

Towards Sustainability

Informal savings groups are largely the handiwork of women because it is women and girls who bear the brunt of poverty with all its attendant vulnerabilities. They were born out of necessity, and so it is in every member's interest to ensure their survival. This may explain why these groups have stood the test of time and continue to multiply in terms of membership and resource pool.

Similarly, African women not only share the disease burden with their male counterparts for common ailments such as malaria, but also have the peculiar challenge of sexual and reproductive health challenges. They also carry a disproportionate burden of HIV/AIDS due to their culturally conditioned weaker position in protecting themselves from infection. As such, a women-led community-based health insurance mechanism is a self-sustaining model based on the strength of its motivation, not the depth and breadth of its resource pool.

Conclusion

Repeated affliction tends to build resilience, just as repeated infection tends to build immunity. The success of women's savings groups in fighting household poverty in Africa is largely attributable to the disproportionate burden of poverty and vulnerability that African women have had to shoulder over the years. Similarly, African women and girls continue to disproportionately bear the disease burden, while great governmental health interventions are often undone by simple inadequacies such as a shortage of fuel for ambulances or faulty power generators. A pregnancy complication under such circumstances, for instance, can not wait for procurement bureaucracy to run its course. It is high time we replicate the success of women savings groups and deploy the model at another battle front where African women and girls are the disproportionate victims.

3. UNDP, Saving Groups Lift Vulnerable Rwandans Out of Poverty. Available at <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/ourstories/community-based-saving-groups-drive-vulnerable-rwandan-household.html>. Accessed on May 25, 2020 at 7:47PM.

4. This, however, should not be interpreted as the author's endorsement of child marriage.

LA CRISE DU CORONAVIRUS LES FEMMES TRAVAILLEUSES DANS LES MAQUIS ET LES RESTAURATRICES DE NUIT AUX ABOIS !

Samake Tenin is a Malian blogger, photographer and feminist activist. She is the founder and chief editor of Womanager, a platform for the empowerment and emancipation of African women, and particularly women of Mali. Her work focuses on women, gender equality and feminism. She has a Bachelor's degree in business communication and is an alumna of the YALI Regional Leadership Center of Dakar.

Tenin is full of engagement, authenticity, sharing and passion !



AKB
AFRICAN YOUNG FEMINIST VOICES

La pandémie du COVID-19 risque d'augmenter de façon considérable les inégalités socio-économiques déjà existantes entre les femmes et les hommes. D'un point de vue sanitaire, le risque qu'ont les femmes de développer le virus est très élevé car ce sont elles qui prennent soin des personnes malades, dans les familles et les hôpitaux. Et d'un point de vue économique, l'épidémie affecte davantage leurs revenus et leur niveau de vie, surtout celles qui pratiquent des métiers précaires ou des emplois informels.

Les licenciements résultants de la baisse d'activité dans le contexte de l'épidémie ont atteint un quota assez élevé. Le Mali ne fait pas exception à cette situation. D'après une étude du Programme des

Nations Unies pour le Développement (PNUD), environ 3% des maliennes sont des salariées, la proportion donc des maliennes qui interviennent dans l'informel est importante. Les mesures sanitaires prises par les autorités maliennes ont évidemment affecté les activités génératrices de revenus en particulier dans le secteur de l'informel.

Il s'agit ici, des femmes qui travaillent dans les maquis, les bars ou celles qui tiennent de petits restaurants de nuit au bord des routes bamakoises. Beaucoup d'entre elles se retrouvent du jour au lendemain dans des situations socio-économiques très difficiles.

La pandémie a aggravé les inégalités économiques et sociales pour les femmes

Florence 26 ans, mère de deux enfants et serveuse dans un maquis nous confie: « Je n'ai pas reçu de salaire depuis le mois mars, je vis de mes économies. Le bar dans lequel je travaille est fermé depuis cette date. Le patron nous donne souvent quelques sous, entre 5000 et 10,000 francs CFA, pour nous dépanner mais c'est hélas insuffisant. Pour une mère célibataire de deux enfants comme moi, les choses sont très difficiles mais où se plaindre?

Une fois que les activités reprendront officiellement j'espère recevoir mes arriérés et conserver mon travail.»

Bon nombre de jeunes femmes sont dans la même situation que Florence. Malheureusement, pour celles avec peu d'économie c'est la précarité absolue. Car, en plus de subvenir à leurs propres besoins, certaines femmes doivent également subvenir aux besoins de la famille. «La carrière de certaines jeunes femmes risque de ne jamais se remettre du coronavirus» pour citer Sarah Fielding. Les mesures prises par l'Etat malien ont accru la vulnérabilité de ces groupes de femmes. Les autorités semblent indifférentes au sort de ces femmes et elles ne prévoient aucune aide

qui leur est destinée, alors que celles-ci, en plus d'être des citoyennes, constituent une main d'œuvre valable pour le pays.

Christelle, caissière dans un maquis bien en vogue de la place, semble prendre la situation avec sagesse et compréhension. Elle raconte: «je suis malienne mais ma famille vit en Côte d'Ivoire. Je travaille depuis 10 ans comme caissière dans le maquis «X». Depuis la fermeture de l'endroit à cause du coronavirus je ne travaille plus. Notre situation actuelle est déplorable et sans précédent. J'ai trois enfants, auxquels je dois envoyer de l'argent chaque mois. Mais ce mois-ci je n'ai rien pu envoyer.

J'ai fini mes économies et je vis des sous empruntés à des amis. Plus d'activité, plus de salaire. J'évite d'être défaitiste en me disant que ce n'est de la faute de personne; ni des autorités, ni des organisations internationales. Mais j'espère que les choses vont se régler très bientôt. Je voulais retourner en Côte d'Ivoire aux côtés de ma famille mais ce n'est pas possible à cause de la fermeture des frontières. Je vais au maquis des fois pour voir ce que je peux faire et racketter au passage le patron pour pouvoir m'acheter des provisions.»



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«On l’a vu plus haut, la prévalence des femmes dans le travail «informel» n’est pas sans conséquence. Dans certains pays de l’Afrique subsaharienne comme le Gabon, le Cameroun ou même le Mali, 73% des femmes économiquement actives travaillent dans le secteur informel»

Fatou Gueye et Ahmadou Aly Mbaye - chercheurs universitaires

Interpeller sur la situation des restauratrices de nuit

En longeant la route la nuit dans la capitale malienne, vous verrez des femmes qui tiennent des petits restaurants dans les kiosques. Vendre de la nourriture la nuit est leur unique activité génératrice de revenus. Tout comme les travailleuses dans les maquis ou les bars, ces dernières sont très touchées par la pandémie, puisque leurs activités sont suspendues depuis le début de la crise.

Amaga, restauratrice et jeune mariée nous confie: «le coronavirus a eu raison de mon activité. À cause du couvre-feu instauré par l’Etat, j’ai fixé mes horaires de travail de 18h à 20h30, alors qu’avant le covid-19 c’était de 19h à 01h du matin. Hormis la réduction de mes heures de travail, les clients n’achètent plus la bouffe. J’ai donc été dans l’obligation de fermer mon kiosque. Et depuis je ne travaille plus. Moins de revenus pour ma famille.» Face à cette question de vulnérabilité, ces femmes sont exposées à d’autres activités, qui peuvent leur permettre de subvenir à leurs besoins. Ce qui risque de les amener dans des réseaux de trafic ou de prostitution et de se trouver dans des activités qu’elles ne menaient pas auparavant.

L’impact du coronavirus sur la vie des femmes au Mali est immense, on peut même affirmer

que celles-ci sont des victimes directes de la crise sanitaire actuelle. Les organisations non gouvernementales, les associations de femmes en partenariat avec les autorités doivent se pencher sur le sujet. Et mener à la fois des réflexions et des actions pour accompagner ces groupes. Aussi, adapter au contexte actuel des projets destinés aux femmes et aux jeunes filles, pour favoriser l’émancipation et réduire les inégalités socio-économiques en période de pandémie.

Maimouna Djoncounda Dembélé, militante des droits humains et spécialiste en genre et égalité femme-homme, nous confie que «dans les initiatives communautaires de la prévention au COVID-19, il faut impliquer les femmes, tenir compte de leur disponibilité pour mener les activités et leur faire comprendre comment elles peuvent être des actrices pour prévenir et réduire la vitesse de propagation du virus. L’Etat doit aussi créer des projets pour orienter les femmes lésées par le COVID-19 pour que ces dernières puissent mener des activités.

Et enfin, vu que les ONG ne sont plus actives sur le terrain, les autorités doivent trouver les moyens de sensibiliser sur les violences sexistes, qui augmentent en nombre chaque jour en cette période de crise.» ■



DES MAUX SANS MOTS

Malika SOUNA is a blogger from Niger. She is passionate about social media and their capacity in empowering Nigerien women from urban and rural worlds throughout her blog Waymo, Quotidien de la femme nigérienne. She has a young daughter and is a women's and girls' rights advocate. Malika puts passion and time in listening and sharing with her community to achieve their common goals and their fulfillment.

Malika considers herself as a person with great empathy and confidence. She loves innovation and always does what she likes.

Il est 19 heures passées de quelques minutes sur Niamey, capitale du Niger. Depuis quelques jours, à cette heure, les appels à la prière ont fait place aux bruits incessants des moteurs sur les grandes routes comme dans les ruelles. Les retardataires s'empressent de rentrer chez eux avant de croiser les forces de défense qui patrouillent. Depuis l'enregistrement du premier cas de Covid-19, les autorités ont pris des mesures draconiennes pour limiter la propagation de la pandémie. À Niamey, la région la plus touchée, les lieux de culte ont été fermés et un couvre-feu a été instauré.

Assise dans leur maison familiale, Samira, vingt et un ans, joue avec son bébé de deux ans. Cette jeune femme, licence en poche, est rentrée chez ses parents il y a tout juste quelques jours après trois années tumultueuses de vie conjugale. Dans sa nouvelle vie de célibataire, elle ressasse ses souvenirs de mariage. «Avant de me marier, je pensais que le mariage était tout sauf une prison. Qu'il y aura certes des hauts et des bas, mais jamais des coups et des injures», dit Samira.

Le rêve de la jeune mariée, s'est estompé un mois après avoir épousé celui qui était son premier amour, un amour du lycée qu'ils ont su maintenir jusqu'au mariage. Dans nos traditions, après le mariage, le couple prépare à manger pour l'amener ensuite chez leurs parents et c'est là que les problèmes ont commencé.

Samira se souvient, «lorsque nous avons amené les plats chez les parents de monsieur, sa maman insista pour prendre les plats. Ne voulant pas vexer ma belle-mère, j'ai alors cédé. Ceci n'a pas plu à mon mari. De retour à la maison, il était fou furieux au point de me dire que je n'avais aucun respect pour ses parents. Je m'en étais excusée en lui promettant que ça n'allait plus recommencer.»

Au fil des jours, les choses n'ont fait qu'empirer, entre insultes et coups, Samira avance que «les moments les plus difficiles étaient pendant ma grossesse, j'avais cru qu'il serait plus indulgent avec moi, mais,

c'est le moment qu'il a choisi pour porter la main sur moi. Bizarrement j'avais fini par conclure que c'était moi la fautive, surtout qu'on m'avait prévenu que pendant la grossesse, nous les femmes, nous avons des sauts d'humeurs et des envies inexplicables. J'ai donc laissé passer.» Ce dont Samira ne se doutait pas, c'est que ce coup va être le premier d'une longue série.

Les injures vont laisser place aux agressions physiques. Elle n'osait pas parler de ce qu'elle vivait, parce que c'était son choix et on risque de le lui rappeler. D'ailleurs, au Niger, on te dit que le jour de ton mariage, après la nuit de noce, l'amour s'en va. Il est alors remplacé par la patience. Mais de quelle patience parle-t-on? De cette patience où tu dois tout subir? De cette patience où tu es traitée comme un moins que rien? De cette patience où tu dois supporter et ne jamais rien dire? Est-ce cela le mariage? Je crains que non.



Au Niger, les derniers chiffres sur les violences faites aux femmes remontent à plus d'une décennie. Ils estiment que 43% des violences subies par les femmes sont physiques tandis que 28% sont sexuelles. Au stade actuel, on ignore le nombre exact de femmes qui croulent sous les coups et autres violences de la part de leurs conjoints, mais une chose est sûre: certaines mesures prises pour limiter la propagation du COVID-19 n'ont pas arrangé la situation des femmes victimes de violences conjugales.

C'était le cas de Samira, qui avait à supporter le comportement de celui qui était à l'époque son mari. Elle ajoute que «auparavant, il lui arrivait de traîner dehors, c'était un moment de répit pour moi. Mais depuis l'instauration du couvre-feu, les choses n'ont fait qu'empirer. Il était à la maison à 19 heures tapantes et quand il est là c'est le chaos. J'avais comme l'impression qu'il déchargeait sur moi la frustration de ne pas pouvoir sortir.»



Si le Covid-19 impose une limitation des déplacements, Samira était déjà habituée à ces restrictions, «monsieur m'empêchait de sortir, même quand je voulais partir voir mes parents, je devais passer un interrogatoire et des questions comme; à quand remonte la dernière fois où j'étais chez eux? Qu'est-ce que je vais chercher? Bref, je n'avais plus de vie. Mon seul exutoire était mon téléphone et les réseaux sociaux. Mais là aussi, monsieur avait imposé des règles; sur Facebook et Instagram je ne devais rien publier, et sur WhatsApp, je subissais des inspections surprises.»

On dit chez nous que quelle que soit la durée de la nuit, le soleil finira par apparaître, et le soleil de Samira était apparu un soir alors qu'elle s'apprêtait à passer, comme d'habitude, des moments difficiles. «Je lisais sur Facebook le témoignage d'une dame souffrant d'un handicap à vie à la suite des coups de son époux. Ce fut un déclic, je m'étais demandé ce que j'allais devenir et que deviendrait mon enfant si jamais ça m'arrivait. Un soir pendant le mois du Ramadan, après la rupture du jeûne, j'avais fait tomber mon téléphone par mégarde. Monsieur était fou de rage en disant que je ne fais jamais attention aux choses et si je cassais mon téléphone c'était à lui de m'en acheter un autre. Ce soir j'avais eu le courage de lui dire d'arrêter de me crier dessus. C'est là que les choses ont dégénéré car il voulait me «corriger» comme il aime bien le dire.»

Ce soir-là, deux choix se présentaient à Samira; «je devais décider entre accepter de le laisser me tabasser ou me soulager de mes maux sans mots. J'ai vite fait de m'isoler dans ma chambre avec mon bébé et de fermer la porte. Je ne l'ai ouverte qu'au petit matin et il était déjà parti travailler. J'avais eu suffisamment le temps pour réfléchir et prendre une décision: vaut mieux m'en aller plutôt qu'on vienne prendre mon corps.» C'est ainsi que le lendemain matin, Samira, profitant de l'absence de son époux, fit ses valises et rentra chez elle avec son bébé tout en sachant que son entourage, que la société, son entourage n'allaient pas l'accueillir à bras ouverts.

Arrivée chez elle, les réactions fusaient de partout, elle raconte que «le seul qui m'avait compris c'était papa.» Aujourd'hui, si Samira a pu s'en aller, ce n'est pas le cas pour beaucoup de jeunes filles et de femmes qui doivent subir et qui n'ont pas encore brisé le silence. Nous devons avoir de milliers de Samira qui diront NON mais aussi une société beaucoup plus souple. Ne dit-on pas que ce qui a poussé un rat à se réfugier dans un feu est certainement plus chaud que le feu? À méditer. ■



العنف المنزلي ضد المرأة أثناء الحجر الصحي

Fadwa Dafallah is a Sudanese amateur writer. She has a Bachelor's with Honours from the Sudan University of Science and Technology in electronic engineering and is currently pursuing a degree in dentistry. Fadwa is an expert at the Sudan Knowledge Platform. She also works on SDGs and societal issues with focus on domestic violence.

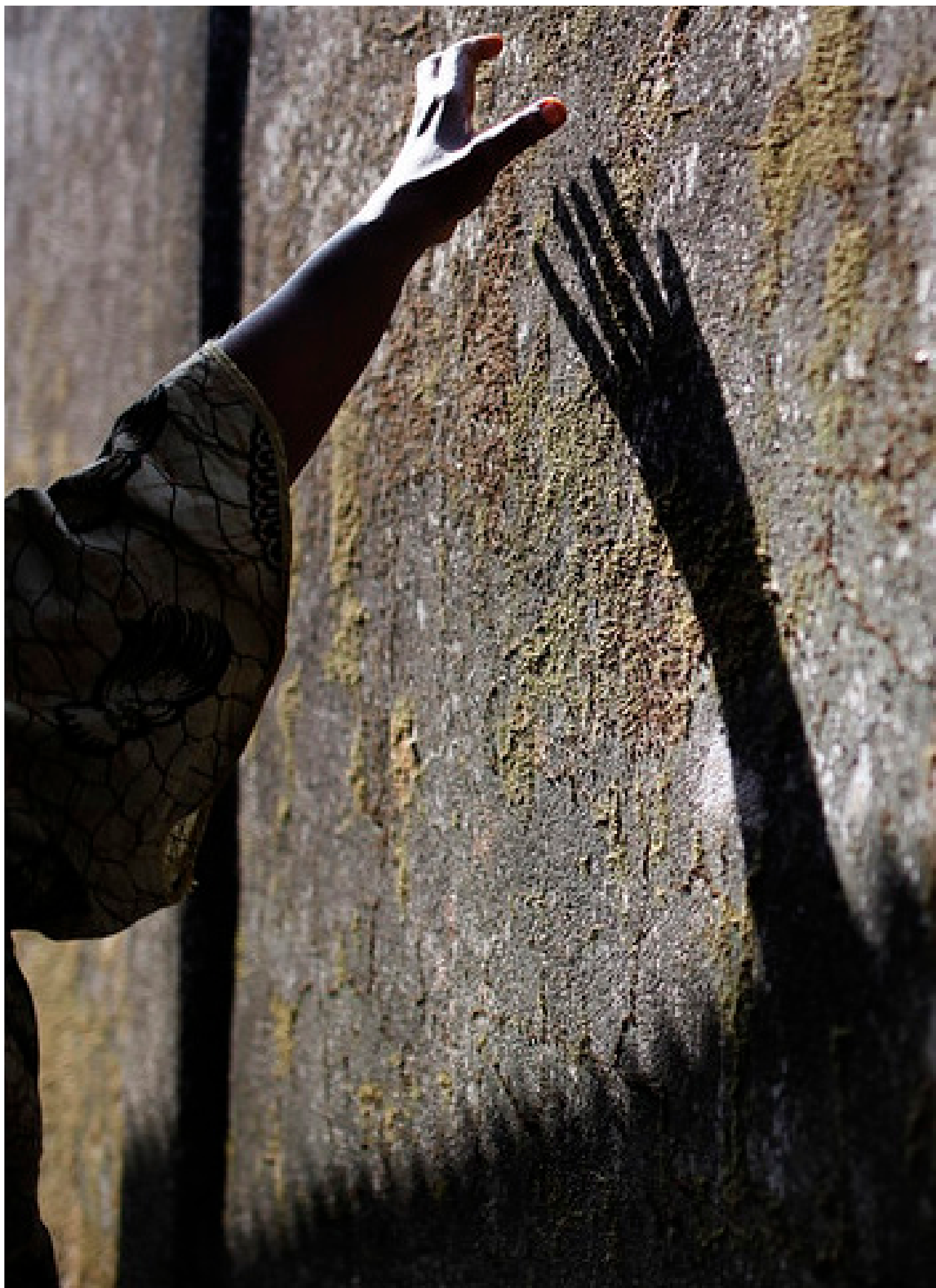
Fadwa considers herself as a creative and proactive person who is interested in volunteering and who has great skills in communication.

في ظل الحجر الصحي والإجراءات الاحترازية للحد من تفشي وباء كورونا، ينتشر وباء من نوع مختلف تماما لكنه ليس أقل خطورة منه في كثير من المجتمعات. بين جدران المنازل فتيات حبيسات تخطين العمر الاجتماعي المفروض عليهن للزواج يتعرضن للعنف المنزلي بما في ذلك العنف الجسدي واللفظي والإهانة تحت مصطلح "بايرة" والذي يطلق على كل فتاة تعدت العمر الاجتماعي للزواج ولم تتزوج. كما تستعمل كلمات جارحة لنفس الغرض مثل "فاتها قطار الزواج" والتي تنكسر وتصمت الكثير من الفتيات خجلا من نفسها عند سماعها، والتي تصبح ذات وقع شبيه بارتكاب جريمة

غرس المجتمع الذي تعيش فيه مفاهيم خاطئة فيها أصبحت مسلمات في حياتها، وصاحبها الخوف من أقرب الناس إليها في المنزل كأبيها وأخيها أو غيرهم من أفراد الأسرة، فتغيرت المعادلة حيث أصبحت تتهرب منهم بدل أن تحتمي بهم وتلوذ إليهم، ليصير الصمت حجرتها الآمنة والعزلة سكينتها وملاذ روحها المنهكة. تعاقب بالأعمال المنزلية التي فرضها المجتمع عليها مجبرة على تأدية الأعمال الشاقة التي تكابدها بلا رحمة، والتي تعاقب في حالة عدم أدائها كما ينبغي حتى في أيام الدورة الشهرية فلا تعفى منها ولا يخفف عليها عبئها بالرغم من معرفتهم بخطورة معاناتها المثبتة بالدراسات الطبية

تعيش الفتاة جوا مليئا بالإهانات وعدم التقدير وانعدام احترام كيانها كإنسان، وتستمر المرأة في الصمت، وهو الأمر الذي يدفعهم للتبادي في اضطهادها، ونفسه الأمر الذي يدفعها أن تحلم بالزواج ظنا منها بأنه الخلاص الأبدي، حاملة -أو متناسية- أن ذلك الزوج هو نتاج نفس المجتمع الهاربة منه، فتقبل بذلك بأقرب خيار أمامها دون أن تسأل عنه. ويصل الأمر أحيانا بأن يتفق أبوها أو أخوها على تزويجها دون علمها وإكراهها على خيار غير موفق بالنسبة لها وما عليها سوى الاستسلام كما اعتادت. ولكن كثيرا ما تبدأ معاناة أشد في بيت الزوجية؛ خلف تلك الجدران تصبر وتصمد المرأة خوفا من الوصمة الاجتماعية، وإن تجرأت على الحديث أو النقاش تتعرض للضرب، فتلجأ الفتاة لمحاولات الانتحار المتكررة. ويبقى عدد الضحايا مجهولا في تلك المجتمعات أين لا أحد يعلم كم من فتاة كان العنف المنزلي سببا في وفاتها. وإن حديث فتاة أو امرأة عن قضية مثل هذه القضايا يعتبر إثما عظيما لا مجال له بين تلك العقول محدودة الأفق

تتدرج مراحل نشأة الفتاة من فتاة إلى امرأة ثم إلى أم وآلة للإنجاب ومربية أطفال، وأحيانا كثيرة ورغم ظروف الحجر الصحي المفروضة حاليا تعمل المرأة خارج المنزل أعمالا شاقة نظرا للوضع المادي المتردي للأسرة ورغم عملها هذا تظل تؤدي واجباتها المنزلية بإخلاص بلا حقوق تؤدي إليها أو تحفظ. وأحيانا كثيرة أيضا لا تحظى المرأة بالتعليم، فالتعليم يعد رفاهية نسبة للفقير الذي قد تعيشه أو عدم الإيمان بأهميته. ويعتقد الكثير أن المرأة إذا تعلمت ستغير مفاهيمها إلى مفاهيم لا تلائمهم فيحاولون تضيق وعي المرأة لخدمة مصالحهم وأنانيتهم



صوت المرأة غير مسموع هناك وحياة المرأة بلا طعم والويل لها إن كان حظها من الإنجاب بنات حيث تصبح مكافأتها الزواج من أخرى أو الإهانة التي ستتردد للأبد على مسامعها. في ظل مجتمع يفضل إنجاب الذكور وإجبار المرأة على الحمل المتتالي حتى تأتيهم بالورثة والسند أي الذكور. والويل لها إن رفضت الإنجاب. تزايدت معدلات الإجبار على الحمل في فترة الحجر الصحي بدون تنظيم وعدم حصول الكثير من النساء على مستلزمات الصحة الجنسية والانجابية أو منعهن منها عمدا فتجبر المرأة حتى وإن واجهت مشاكل صحية من الحمل على أن تصمت خوفا على أبنائها الصغار المتقاربين عمرا وخوفها عليهم يفوق خوفها على نفسها وعلى فقرها، كما تجبرها حاجتها إلى معيل على البقاء مع زوج يضربها ليلا ونهارا، وخوف من المجتمع إذا أرادت أن تنفصل فيصبح الطلاق وصمة عار تكون المنبوذة في مجتمع يجد سكنته في إهانة الضعيف ويبرز عضلاته ويفتلها ويتفنن في إذلالها. في الأيام العادية، كان غياب الزوج هو المتنفس. كانت فرصة لأن ترتاح قليلا من معاناتها

ما أن تكبر إحدى بناتها قليلا يستوجب المجتمع ختان البنات سرا بعيدا عن السلطات والرقابة. للأسف، السماح للرجل بأن يفرض رجولته على امرأة ضعيفة شعور مخز. فمن المؤسف أن يكون وجود الزوج أو الأب أو الأخ في المنزل خلال الحظر مأساة بالنسبة لها رغم أنهم من تلمس المرأة عندهم الحنان والأمان في وجودهم. للأسف بين جدران الكثير من المنازل أحلام نساء ذبلت وموت بطيء وطعنات من الأقربين أشد ألما من الغريب. هذا حال كثير من النساء في مجتمعاتنا في أفريقيا، الأمر الذي يحتاج إلى تحقيق ورصد إحصائيات

أيتها المرأة أنت عظيمة. لم تكوني في يوم أقل شأنا من الرجل. كوني دائما قويه ولا تلتفتي لمن يهينك أو من يقلل من شأنك. لا تلقي السماع لمن ينادونك ببائرة. لا تستسلمي لمن يكسر مجاديف أحلامك الخضراء في مجتمع نظرت له سوداء! داكنة. كافحي من أجل حقوقك في الحياة

الوضع الحالي صعب جدا وخطير لكل امرأة تعاني من العنف والعنف المنزلي صعب على كل امرأة إن هي حاولت أن تنقذ نفسها بالإتصال على الخط الساخن لمكافحة العنف ضد المرأة فيزيد العنف الأسري عليها. الأثر السلبي العميق والضرر المبرئ وغير المبرئ يحملنا على أكتافنا رسالة يجب أن تصل، و يستوجب علينا المشاركة والبحث والحديث عن حلول مختلفة ومبرنة. الحل بأن يصل الوعي لكل المجتمعات والطبقات المهمشة في المجتمع، الحل بالتعليم ووضع منهج متخصص في الحقوق الإنسانية، الحل أن تقام ورشات توعوية مع كل مجتمع بلغته؛ وأقصد هنا بما يناسب إدراكه وبالطريقة التي يمكن أن تغير فيه وتؤثر في قراراته. الحل في تمكين المرأة وزيادة ثقته وقوتها لمواجهة الحياة. الحل بإعلام متمكن يخدم قضايا المرأة

نظل جميعنا نحلم بمجتمع يتفهم الصحة النفسية والانجابية والجسدية لكل امرأة في أي مكان في أفريقيا. نحلم بأن يصل صوت المرأة في أي مكان عاليا مسموعا وأن نحارب الخوف والوصمة الاجتماعية. لكي تعيش أي امرأة حياة أفضل يجب أن تنجو من العنف والعنف المنزلي فالمرأة هي المجتمع ولا بد للمجتمع أن ينشأ سليما معافى



“ The African youth has clearly risen to the occasion in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic. We have witnessed their actions in awareness campaigns, in mobilization against sexual and gender based violence, in digital innovations and many other areas, responding to true needs of communities. It is clear that a better tomorrow can only be built with the co-leadership and full engagement of Africa creative youth ”

Mme. Mme Bineta Diop
AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace & Security



“The world is now focused on fighting the spread of Coronavirus and saving lives. I am calling upon leaders, to support intergenerational co-leadership in the fight for justice, in the fight to save our public health system and in the fight to respond to COVID-19. We are urging youth whom we call Generation Equality to make sure that the unfulfilled promise of the Beijing Declaration will be fulfilled ”

Mme. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka
Executive Director of UN Women
During Virtual AU Youth Consultations Series on COVID-19, June 2020



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WOES OF AFRICAN FEMINISTS

Dunyo Joyce is a Senior High School graduate and women's voices activist from Ghana. She is passionate about fighting for full-fledged equality and pursuit of reproductive and sexual freedom. **Joyce** is also an innovative and creative thinker and has the conviction of excelling in the entrepreneurial industry.

She considers herself as an intrinsically motivated young lady, naturally curious and obsessive note taker. She is very optimistic about herself and others.





We now have benevolent institutions that are only claimed to lift African feminists from where she now finds herself. The reality is that the poverty and ignorance of African feminists is the glory of most civilizations. Poverty is an institution; ignorance is an industry; a big industry as there are those who want African women to continue to wallow in poverty and ignorance because the downfall and naïve nature of African feminists is in their benefits. The better we wake up to the realities, the safer we are as women of this continent.

The people of Madagascar are saying that they have discovered something capable of dealing with the pandemic but the WHO is asking if it conforms with the protocols that have been prescribed? But the question is; who prescribed these protocols? It is pharmaceutical companies outside there? And why didn't they perform the necessary researches on the Malagasy discovery but rather rejected it?

Feminists in Africa, from my perspective, are under-performing. We are punching below the waist. There is the sense in which we are not realizing our potentials and of course when we found ourselves in situations like this, we have no shortage of excuses. We are actors of our own misfortunes. There is a

sense for which African feminists have demonstrated that we have no faith in ourselves. Our levels of esteems are such that, we doubt ourselves and our capabilities and even the things we ought to do, we do not do them, and thus the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed our weaknesses. When we examined our hospitals and clinics, we have found them wanting.

The entire continent of Africa has few hospital facilities less than Germany, Spain, Italy, and South Korea. When Africa was hungry for face and nose masks, we cannot even make them in Africa and Jack Ma has to give us masks and it was only after that I discovered that I can personally make masks. No wonder Ali Mazrui in his African heritage says "Africa produces what it does not consume and consumes what it does not produce."

African women can not afford the luxury of engaging in perpetual lamentations. I think that African women can now, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, recognize that; this is an opportunity to seize to showcase to the world that we have potentials. To conclude, I therefore, propose that as policymakers all over Africa take actions to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is paramount to consider gender dynamics in our communities.

Tanzanian Rahma Bajum is an African feminist whose story still remained untold and virtually underrepresented. She is the founder and creative Director of MnM Clothing and design company in Dar Es Salam. Her company focuses on bringing back the love for African prints by producing fashionable and quality African clothes, home decors, furniture, toys and notebooks among others. She has been working in the youth sector for more than a decade and holds junior and senior positions in different youth organizations as well as international organizations.

She is someone who believes that changing policies and African feminists' agenda particularly in the youth environment is not the work of governments alone thus private sector is key stakeholder and that is how she founded MnM. This is an untold story of a creative and innovative African feminist. Her MnM project was featured in 2018 by Forbes among the top promising entrepreneurs in Africa. She states that day that, emphatically, she believes in youth capacity and ability to change the narratives of Africans now and in the future. And in realizing our potentials as African feminists, we must start giving credit and reignition to feminists of her type.

Oh, Jesus is Lord ! When?

The critical issue currently known as the COVID-19 pandemic, has indeed exposed Africans to many realities. It was 7 am GMT and I stir. My mind scanned the whole capital. I become sleepless. My brain races and the problem about the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana and in Africa cascaded through the three parts of my brain.

Have we been weighed and found wanting as Africans? But I am optimistic that there will be few feminists within Africa and in the diaspora, who will stand up and become modern-day Moses, not only to be able to defeat this pandemic but to create a new Africa. As the pandemic hits Ghana,

the President was making efforts to charter planes to bring N95 masks, ventilators and PPEs to our health professionals. There again I begun thinking of the gender dynamics among the health workers. It is obvious that women dominated and thus are exposed to the risk of infections.

Hmm ... Accra, which in the lockdown was in a strange and eerie feeling of apocalypse. Where are the school children? The women selling doughnuts? The newspaper sellers, the beggars? Where is the youth particularly ladies selling everything from dog chain to chewing gum? The street supermarkets and malls are gone and substituted by police and army officers ensuring that people stay at home.

At this point, I now know our economy is in a total mess because economic activities have been massively disrupted, hotels closed, industries tottering, airlines are grounded. I screamed and asked myself where is the continent going? Hmm, what must feminists in Africa do to prevent early pregnancy, domestic abuse and other vulnerabilities as schools and other social gatherings are paused? To be honest, there is a hump in my throat even right now when I think about feminists in Africa. I questioned the unbalance between attention to the pandemic and women sexual and reproductive health, I equally questioned the unbalance within the nature of the global architecture. These are grave times surpassing the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918. There is the need for African feminists to arise to the peak and solicit for fund and re-advocate for gender balance.

Indeed, the downfall of Africa and feminists in Africa is the joy of the civilizations. When I remembered what the people of Madagascar are saying about their discovery of vaccine for the pandemic and the World health Organization's responses, I grieve. ■

A portrait of Ruth Nyadzua Mwangome, a young Black woman with long, dark braids. She is wearing a bright orange top with a ruffled collar and large, colorful, circular earrings. She has her arms crossed and is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a plain, light color.

THE DOMESTIC PANDEMIC

Ruth Nyadzua Mwangome

is a Kenyan writer. She holds a degree in education, english and literature from Pwani University. She is published on the Kalahari Review with a satirical political essay entitled "How to become a president in Africa". Ruth is a wife and mother of two. She is an open-minded feminist, a great cook and a dancer.

Mama Mary met Debbie for the first time in her village church one Sunday afternoon after the service. She was visiting during the earlier stage of the unveiling of the COVID-19 pandemic after being away for a very long time. She never intended to interact with her but something about the way she was dressed attracted her attention.

Who on earth would clad in a long sleeve sweater with a long skirt that ended at the ankles on a sunny day in Mombasa, a city known for its extreme heat? Her face wore an exaggerated makeup and the eyes were hidden in sunglasses.



Mama Mary walked up to where Debbie and her companions stood.

- Praise Jesus brethren
- Amen, they answered in unison.
- I don't think if we have officially met, said Mama Mary to Debbie.
- Oh, yeah. I am Mrs Karisa, the new pastor's wife. But you can call me Debbie.
- Do you have a moment to talk?
- Okay.

The two secluded themselves from the rest.

- I am sorry for bugging into your business, but I thought I should tell you that I know what you are going through.
- What do you mean?
- Cut the pretence, Debbie. We both know that you are having trouble with someone at home. Getting a closer look, I see the purple marks on your neck and busted lips. These are clear signs of physical abuse. From my experience, this is definitely not a one-day occurrence from your two-year-old son. My guess is that it is from your husband.

There was an awkward moment of silence.

- It is not what you think. Karisa, my husband, is a preacher and can't physically abuse me, Debbie said.
- That is what you tell yourself. Debbie, physical abuse can happen to anyone no matter your social status. Please speak out and get help.

Suddenly, pastor Karisa showed up and took away his wife.

Mama Mary was named Mary years ago. But the volunteer work she did for women all over Kenya had earned her the title of "Mama" meaning mother in english. She had rescued women of all ages who were suffering from domestic violence. To many men, she was a bad influence on their women and they hated her with passion.

That Sunday, she saw herself through the eyes of Debbie. Twenty years ago, she was just like her. Naive, loyal and in love with her abuser who happened to be her husband. Unlike Debbie, she was married to a tycoon who would pour out his frustration on her body all in the name of having a bad day. Sometimes, he would drink too much and exhibit a bad temper on her through kicks and blows.



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This left her with black eyes or bruises all over her body.

Each time that he beats Mary up, he would later show up with expensive gifts to calm her down and buy her silence.

Just like Debbie, she would cover up his mess with makeup and smiles and behave like how a proper African woman is expected to behave by society. Mama Mary saw the same dilemma in Debbie who was choosing between life or the societal expectations of her.

- What was that filthy woman feeding you? Pastor Karisa asked his wife in a harsh tone as they drove home.
- Nothing. We were just having a normal fashion conversation.
- Better be true. I hate to see you around such a negative influence. That woman has gone haywire and she is running a club of mad women claiming to want equality in status, power, resources and liberation from gender injustices. Such blasphemy! The Bible says in Ephesians 5:22-23 and I quote: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife." So why is she persistent in living in sin as she prefers to be her own head?

Debbie kept quiet the entire time.

When Mama Mary next heard of Debbie, it was during the time the government had restricted citizen's movements. She heard of her through a conversation with a church member who mentioned that she had been hospitalized. Immediately after the talk, she headed to the hospital to meet her. She had a sprained wrist and a few broken ribs. According to the nurse's report, she claimed to have slipped and fallen from the stairs while mopping her tiled floor. But Mama Mary was too brilliant to know that it was just another cover-up.

- You really are persistent Mama Mary, Debbie said the moment she caught sight of her approaching her despite the swollen reddish eyes.
- I love what I do with passion.
- What is it that you really do? Running a club of mad women?
- Oh, so that is what you hear? Anyway, do I look insane to you?

They all laughed. Then a ten minutes moment of silence followed.

- Since the awakening of the COVID-19 pandemic, he has increased the number of times he beats me. He gets offended by everything I do. Since the church services were halted, offerings and tithes stopped coming so I guess that he would undergo intensified financial pressures and burden. The fact that movement is limited, he is forced to spend more time at home unlike in the past and this has made the violence frequent. In short, I am experiencing a double pandemic.
- Let me help you stop the emotional, psychological and physical abuse you have been subjected to Debbie.
- But he loves me.
- Love is not expressed through kicks and blows. So come on honey, you deserve better than this.

Mama Mary helped her dress up, picked her belonging and they left.


As Debbie stepped out of the hospital, she felt relieved. For the first time, she is breathing the fresh air of freedom from a domestic pandemic.



EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION MATCH

Nelago Lyaela Lilonga is a 27-years old Namibian born in a small village called Okahao-Okalondo. She has a diploma in local governance studies from the University of Namibia and has also studied towards a honours degree in public management. Nelago is passionate about her community and advocates for women empowerment. Her biggest dream is to one day build an orphanage.

Nelago Lyaela considers herself as a fighter and good communicator. Whenever she faces a challenge, she applies both logic and emotional aspects in equal proportion. She is passionate about learning new things.



Women-led actions can be described as having women at the frontline, women being involved in day to day activities. Women, by nature, are leaders, selfless, influencers, caretakers and givers of love and hope. Woman-led actions are brought about by a pressing need that requires urgent attention, especially those needs that have been overlooked by many especially by those in power. As an African woman, it is an honour to let the world know about the challenges that we are facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the possible recommendations that can help improving the lives of African women.

Daily struggles are not a new thing to African women. Way before COVID-19, African women have been looked down on, excluded from many important roles in society, being slaved and voiceless. An outspoken woman was classified as rebellious and a bad example to society. African men used this manipulation to keep the African women in bondage for a long period of time. Brave women faced a lot of challenges such as being rejected by society, including their fellow women. Can we blame the African women for crucifying other women for standing up? Absolutely not, because society made sure their minds were programed as such.

Society is made to believe that a woman is a slave, voiceless, powerless, not intelligent enough and her only role is to look after her household. Sad right? It is even more sad because even in 2020 some parts of Africa still treat women as such. African women have never been allowed to get formal education, some are still not allowed to do so, while the only education they are permitted to have is being taught how to do house chores and looking after their children and husbands.

However, the ball is in our hands as African women, the time is now for African women to rise and let their voice be heard. Quoting Miss Universe 2019, it is time to "rise up, take up space in society and conquer."

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges faced by African women have increased, unemployment and loss of education, for an African women, are topping. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a lot of women to get retrenched. Most women in Africa are self-employed

and generate income to feed their families and pay for their tertiary education and that of their children by selling on the streets, braiding hair at their small salons at the corner of the street or selling sweets and food at public places.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments were forced to shut down their economies including public places that are women's markets. The lockdown caused the shutting down of restaurants, guest houses and all the other areas that are dominated by women. Accordingly, the loss of income caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, led women to losing their properties, as they were unable to continue paying rental fees and monthly instalments, and they were forced to sell their other properties such as beds and televisions in order to enable them to afford a meal as well as paying for monthly rental fees.

The education of an African child is mostly funded by women. The loss of jobs and income opportunities by their mothers affected them too. The education of an African women and that of their children is greatly affected by this pandemic. The fact that schools and universities are closed and the only way forward is online classes, left behind women who do not have access to electricity and electronic devices. There is also a set of women who have access to both electricity and electronic devices but due to loss of income caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, they will not be able to afford data or access to Wi-Fi. All these factors will hinder the education that enables them to get formal jobs. This is likely to cause depression or even suicide.

I strongly believe that even if the economy fully opens up, men will get more advantages and privilege because of the social norms that dictates that they have a household to take care of, despite the shifting society. Our society still deems this as normal and unfortunately no one will advocate for this.

And I would like to applaud initiatives such as Sauti, the Africa Young Feminist Blog, which is a great opportunity to make an impact and to restore the hope of African women. Accordingly, I encourage similar initiative and I suggest the following;

1. African women must be empowered, their hopes and the way they look at themselves must be restored;
2. Free online packages such as free monthly subscriptions to internet, free tables must be given to women;
3. Governments must invest in the life of African women by building them decent houses, supplying clean water, sanitary pads, food, access to good health care, etc;
4. Projects such as soap making trainings for women which will enable them to produce soaps for themselves and for selling;
5. Women must venture into providing essential services that do not require any capital and can be done even during this pandemic.
6. Governments and private organisations must aid financially.



Unfortunately, people will still deem this as a waste of resources, thus making it difficult for people to bring forward viable evidence without discrediting it. In a nutshell, it ultimately rests on how things can be accounted for and presented to an ignorant community who will look at it as a holistic figure.

I conclude by quoting Nancy Wilson, the founder and CEO of the Canadian Women's Chamber of

Commerce in an article dated May 2, 2019 that said "it takes only one woman to make a women-led company, that is if you are a tech company looking for investment from venture fund marketed to support female entrepreneurship and participation in the tech sector."

Women are equally important and intelligent as men and deserve to have a voice.



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CE RUBAN VIOLET SUR LA PAILLE

Priscille Mpumbu is a young woman entrepreneur from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Born in Kinshasa, she graduated from the Literature Faculty of the University of Kinshasa. She is an advocate for social assistance and aid.

Priscille considers herself as a creative, dynamic, autonomous, and sociable person.



« Le pouvoir fait violence parce qu'il ne laisse aucune place aux désirs, aux envies et aux droits de l'autre »¹

« J'ai toujours cru que c'était de ma faute. Si la relation allait mal c'était principalement de ma faute ». Victimes des violences conjugales, plusieurs femmes sont aujourd'hui sous les relations d'emprise. Nombreuses d'entre-elles pensent que ce qui leur arrive est notamment due à leurs agissements, à un écart de comportement ou de langage, à

certaines de leurs attitudes envers leurs maris. Cette fausse culpabilité qui se remarque dans le chef des femmes violentées durant des nombreuses années a longtemps été une fermeture à glissière sur les lèvres de celles qui en étaient des victimes, mais qui se forçaient de se persuader, convaincues, qu'elles en étaient les provocatrices.

1. Dr. Valérie Le GOFF-CUBILIER, médecin adjointe Secteur Psychiatrie Ouest, CHUV en Suisse. Citation puisée au cours d'un de ses interviews sur les violences conjugales, Temps présent-violences conjugales, le cycle infernal.



Sur une enquête à ce propos, Cédric Louis et Marie Abbet² ont interviewé plusieurs femmes qui affirmaient ne s'être rendu compte de la violence imposée sur elles qu'à des périodes où les coercitions devenaient plus intenses. Ceci dit, c'est lorsque les dommages causés deviennent plus destructeurs, et parfois irréversibles, que les femmes reconnaissent qu'elles ont vécues tout ce temps sous l'emprise de la violence.

Cette situation est un risque majeur car les enquêtes révèlent que la période de dénonciation d'une violence conjugale est très souvent la période des graves dégradations corporelles ou psychologiques. La plupart des femmes contiennent cette violence par une auto-condamnation jusqu'à ce que les cas deviennent plus destructeurs, d'où le plus à craindre dans les violences conjugales est la voix muette de celles qui ni ne savent ni ne peuvent se plaindre de ces actes causés sur elles. Il est redoutable d'imaginer les types de violences restés non-dénoncés, sachant que seulement 22% des femmes ayant subi des violences arrivent à lever leurs voix.

L'humain, en cette année 2020, vit un terrible revirement. Pour une fois dans le monde, une pandémie cloue à la fois tous les secteurs d'activité de l'être humain. En effet, le COVID-19, étant une pandémie mortelle à contamination rapide, chacun est tenu de respecter les gestes barrières pour se protéger et empêcher la propagation du virus. Il s'avère alors que le confinement est la méthode la plus efficace, car il empêche tout contact avec l'extérieur. Plusieurs familles se voient alors revivre des moments et des relations conjugales qu'ils ont soit perdus faute de temps consacré à leur travail soit abandonnés à cause des probables reculs conjugaux. Le confinement profile, à première vue, un romantisme dans chaque couple.

Mais cet enfermement ne fait-il pas ombrage à certaines actions qu'on pourrait qualifier de criminelles? Le doute n'est-il pas à maintenir si l'on sait que sous certaines impulsivités la plupart des hommes sont capables de porter une main brutale sur leurs conjointes? Le confinement face au COVID-19 ne serait-il pas une pierre pesante qui attirerait ces bouches déjà cousues dans les profondeurs du silence?

Dans le contexte congolais, qu'est mon pays, la situation financière de plusieurs familles s'étant empirée suite aux ralentissements voire aux blocages des activités micro économiques des parents, et des jeunes qui sortent quotidiennement à la recherche de leurs vies, comme on dit ici, a une incidence psychologique auprès de ces derniers.

2. Auteurs du reportage Temps présent-violences conjugales, le cycle infernal.

Les marchés étant mis à l'arrêt, les quotidiens ressemblent désormais à un enfer puisque l'alimentation de la famille doit être assurée pendant toute cette période où personne n'est tenu de s'exposer au péril de sa vie. Les ménages se voient livrer à de dures situations financières qu'ils traversent malgré eux tant le problème est d'ordre mondial.

Dans ces conditions de brisement psychologique, plusieurs hommes sont enclins aux dérives et aux colères. D'où cette humeur favoriserait les violences surtout qu'elles se feraient cette fois-ci dans des conditions d'enfermement au quotidien.

Les femmes restées enfermées avec leurs maris sont contraintes de prendre soin d'eux, reconnaissant ainsi les envies sexuelles de ces derniers qu'elles sont aussi tenues de satisfaire. Ces conditions extrêmes où d'un côté il y a des obligations ménagères à accomplir, l'attention à porter à la famille et de l'autre son rôle d'épouse à exercer, ainsi que le temps interminable des confinements dont le stress, peuvent nous renvoyer un mauvais signal face à la réceptivité de la femme auprès de son mari. Cela nous en dit long sur les formes de violences que la femme peut endurer à cause de cette non-réceptivité.

Ces accumulations des charges sur la tête de la femme peuvent subtilement l'exposer à des reproches, des énervements de son mari. La femme peut alors croire que c'est de sa faute et inverser la responsabilité des violences dont elle serait encline sous l'impatience de l'homme.

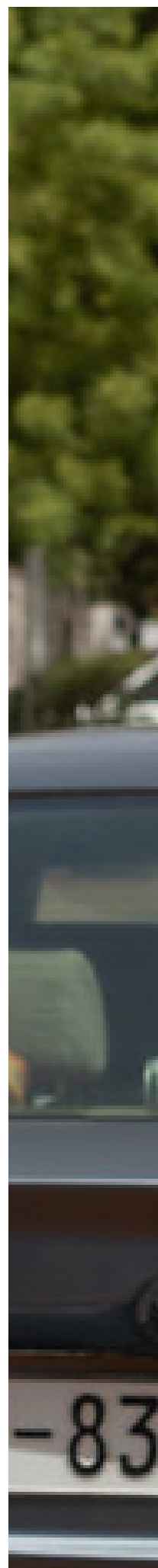
Des paroles blessantes, humiliantes et des attitudes impulsives face à une femme débordée peuvent caractériser la vie de foyer de la plupart des femmes dans ces tristes moments de confinement. Ces paroles, ces attitudes sont des blessures psychologiques qui causent énormément des dommages intérieurs et deviennent au fil des jours qui passent une gangrène sur la santé psychique de cette innocente.

Évidemment qu'elles ne sont pas perceptibles au-dehors, mais ces blessures deviennent encore plus fatales lorsque la femme les avale et essaye de se convaincre d'une trompeuse culpabilité. À force d'encaisser ces horribles attaques et tous ces durs reproches, la femme se détruit de l'intérieur. Elle vit comme si elle n'existait pas, comme n'étant bonne à rien et cela la ronge complètement. Elle se sent effacée du monde et c'est violent de le vivre.

Cette façon de banaliser intérieurement la violence est un puissant facteur de la croissance de ces horribles actes sur nous femmes aux foyers. Partant de ma situation personnelle, j'estime que ce qui caractérise cette tendance à l'encaissement c'est l'envie de chercher à gérer cet état de souffrance que l'on pense pouvoir être dissipé du jour au lendemain.

Oubliant que la violence, quelle que soit sa forme, est un cycle mortel qui commence d'abord par nous détruire à petit feu de l'intérieur, la violence que l'on subit tous pendant cette période sombre ajoute au stress du confinement le malaise de se sentir femme à côté d'un homme dominant et ingrat vis-à-vis du sacrifice que l'on fait. Ces violences dans l'enfermement, aussi petites peuvent-elles sembler nous enlèvent la seule dignité que l'on puisse garder à nos propres yeux. Obligées de voir et d'entendre la même personne avec les mêmes propos tous les jours, notre intérieur fini enfin à créer un déséquilibre et un manque de confiance envers nous-même.

Pour ma part, en quelques mots, j'estime que nous les femmes nous demeurons souvent dans cet état parce que nous pensons gérer un cycle de violence qui ne s'arrêtera presque jamais si on ne le dénonce et on reconnaît être abusées au sein de nos foyers. Le silence est le seul facteur pouvant pérenniser ces cycles de violences. Plus on se taira plus le cycle sera rapide et atteindra le niveau de destruction physique et psychologique le plus élevé.





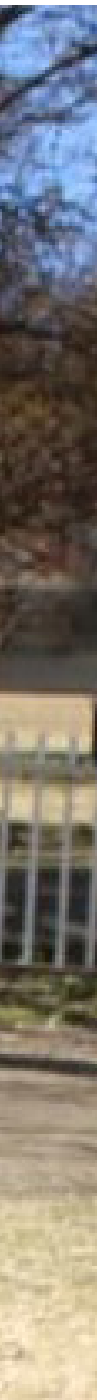
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THE ART OF BEING BRAVE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

Mantsebeng Suzan Maepe is a vivacious social activist hailing from the mountain Kingdom Lesotho with passion for youth development and women's economic empowerment. She is an economics student, a freelance writer, development facilitator and SDGs advocate involved in community development initiatives geared at tackling girls' sexual and reproductive health, micro-finance to foster economic empowerment and is a pioneer for women's rights.

Mantsebeng is an adventurer at heart and an adrenaline junkie as she believes that facing her fears makes her courageous in life. She considers herself as a storyteller at heart, and a pan african feminist.



January 2020, the realization of a dream deferred! That was what Tebello Matsoso felt as she opened the doors to her rondavel-shaped pre-school for children from the small community of Mantsonyane in Thaba-Tseka. 35 school kids, aged between 2 and 4, clad in a maroon-coloured uniform ran through the room with springs in their steps. Adorning the walls of the rondavel were various pictures of the alphabet, numbers and animals, also in big bold letters was, Welcome to Moment of Happiness Pre-school.

The small rondavel was thatched and had neatly placed coloured chairs for the children. The light radiated from the middle of the room, powered by solar energy. Within the room were multiple play toys for the children to play around with.

My heart was full, just seeing what Tebello had achieved. I had worked closely with Tebello for the past year as she had laboured continuously, serving the community initiative as a volunteer in a youth development programme focused on life skills. She had told me about her dream to have a pre-school, where she would be able to create employment and also put her educator skills to the test. Tebello Matsoso, a 28-years old ambitious Mosotho woman was determined not to become an unemployed youth statistic.

She was among the 29% of Basotho youths who face unemployment. After graduating from the Lesotho College of Education, some 5 years back, she had only worked at a 1-year duration project run by one of the NGOs in Lesotho, after which the project ended, she was embattled in a never-ending cycle of unemployment. The youth unemployment in Lesotho affects females more adversely than the males according to the Lesotho National Youth Policy of 2017. Most of the youths have long given up on ever finding jobs within the government as positions there are plagued by corruption and nepotism.

The opportunities for jobs are even less in the rural and remote areas. Due to a lot of services not being decentralized, it is not easy for a lot of youths in the rural areas to apply for job positions, especially those that do not allow email or online application formats. Another hindrance being is the inaccessibility to newspaper delivery at the remote areas. The disparity between rural and urban areas is very high, in terms of service availability, delivery and developmental progress.

For instance, Thaba-Tseka has no private school at all. After saving the little she could, Tebello and her partner had finally managed to open up their kindergarten. They had filled a gap within Mantsonyane, where there had been a steady rise of people from different districts relocate because of the St James Hospital. The new residents often left their children in the lowlands, due to lack of good kindergarten schools.

“In March, when the government announced a nationwide lockdown and closed down schools, I was crestfallen. The school would not only be out of income, but I was worried about the detrimental effects such as the fact that the children would backtrack while at home. Like everyone else, we were hopeful that the lockdown would not take too long”, says Tebello. While schools had closed, Tebello had to move back home to Mashai, further deeper within the rural district. The COVID-19 lockdown was meant to be for just 21 days, but it increased to a further 14 days. Despite the loss of income, Tebello and her partner still had to find means to pay rent at their school. While they could go without salaries, paying the rent was non-negotiable.

Faced with this insurmountable task in hand, Tebello did not sit on her laurels when she got back home in Mashai. She realised that with the COVID-19 lockdown, in order to aid with the social distancing policy, it would be helpful to have a small shop in the village to provide some small food supplies.

With the lockdown restrictions being against crowding of people in taxis, for the small rural community which has only one taxi operating, this would be a huge setback in the daily operations of the villagers.

“I started operating my spaza shop during the lockdown, this has not only helped me generate income in order to pay rent for the school but also to help out my fellow villagers. I believe that charity begins at home, hence it is up to me to be the change that I want to see in the world,” says Tebello. Asked on what gave her strength to actually persevere on during the lockdown when everyone is anxious and doubtful about the future, Tebello indicated that she found strength in thinking about others and not herself, and also knowing that her dreams were valid and would still be realized even after the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I know that we are all suffering, but I find solace in knowing that *Lieta tseo ke li roetseng ha li kholo ho nfeta*. This Basotho saying meaning that the shoes one walks in, can never be too big for them, indicates that no problem is too heavy to bear. I have seen a lot of goodness come out of this pandemic, I have seen Basotho rallying together to help the less fortunate during the pandemic. It was just like the old days, where the true meaning of Ubuntu was realised,” she further noted.

Tebello is one of the resilient Basotho youths who have managed to persevere during the COVID-19 pandemic, and not just despair and look at the negative effects of the pandemic. In the true essence of Basotho, young women have risen up to take their rightful place during the pandemic and strive to make a difference in Lesotho. The future of Lesotho belongs to the young and fearless young women like Tebello, who are exemplary leaders in their own right!





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Lontfobeko Manana is a graduate candidate of the Pan African University in Cameroon where she will be conducting research on regional integration and governance. She has worked with the Mennonite community on community-based peacebuilding and conflict resolution approaches. Lontfobeko finds that reading feminists' works is intellectually stimulating, and helpful for her to navigate embedded patriarchy in eSwatini, her home and beloved country.

Lontfobeko Manana enjoys gazing at the clouds, and is inspired by the rain. She appreciates diversity and loves to make decision, particularly on matters affecting gender disparity.

HAVENS FROM FEAR AND MARGINALIZATION

This blog is about a young and bold feminist, making a difference in eSwatini, a culturally patriarchal society. Patriarchy has created a fertile ground for discrimination against women, undermining, undervaluing and depriving them in terms of skills and capabilities. A woman does not get to enjoy freedom as male counterparts in society. In spite of the challenges, a young feminist is thriving amidst patriarchy in eSwatini. Ncedisa Sihlongonyane, is a young feminist working towards improving the plight of women in eSwatini through community service. She founded Herstorymakers Initiative which is committed to women development and empowerment through community-based education and sensitizing about development, healthcare, entrepreneurship and gender-related issues.

One remarkable notion about this inclusive empowerment is that empowering the whole society prepares the fertile ground for the empowered women and girls to exist and strive as well as to exercise their full potential. Even though there are many women empowerment initiatives which focus only on women, empowered women still find themselves at a disadvantaged position when the society is not ready to embrace them. Empowered women and girls have to go back to underpowered men and society.

Owing to underpowered men is the fact that further debilitation of the efforts of women empowerment occurs, which, in turn, worsens the risks of these women to be treated with hostility and further marginalization since the society will not be capable of handling them. This frustrates both women and society and therefore intensifies tensions which undermines the efforts of women empowerment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has failed to silence her contribution. In the midst of the lock down, Sihlongonyane adapted by changing strategy, turning to social media to spread the message. Her career as a counsellor and model and her social lifestyle have exposed her to community work and outreach activities which complement her genuine character of love for young girls and women. The initiative focuses on allowing women to share

and listen to the stories of women and girls aged between 13 and 30, and also provides reproductive healthcare and hygiene education and awareness. The Herstorymakers Initiative offers women with development and transferable skills by empowering them through talent development. This helps to build their confidence which the founder believes is an important factor in development; economically and socially. Strengthening and making reproductive healthcare education accessible is also critical. Women often get left out in reproductive discussions even though they are the mostly impacted since the society laid the burden of the responsibility of reproduction on them.

Empowering young girls to learn to own their reproductive health and family planning without shame and to acknowledge that they are important and valid puts women in a better position to make informed decisions with their bodies and help them to be able to take care of their reproductive health and therefore improving their lives. eSwatini battles with HIV/AIDS, STIs and teenage pregnancy, and cancer, especially cervical cancer.

The Herstorymakers Initiative has a significant contribution in making education and reproductive healthcare and family planning accessible and therefore impacts social, physical and economic development. The decentralization of such care helps information to reach out to people and since knowledge is power, the society gains abundance in this resource which decreases the mortality rate.

Furthermore, her initiative offers women hygiene care such as sanitary items which, for a greater majority of women, are a luxury considering eSwatini's poor economy as a majority of women live below the poverty line.

Supplying schooled girls with sanitary towels helps them as they do not have to miss school because of their monthly periods. In turn, such provision contributes in girls getting quality education. Sihlongonyane further advocates for healthy living and entrepreneurship through linking girls with modelling agencies and also offering mentorship and guidance.



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This empowers girls to have career options and to develop their talents and interpersonal skills through discipline and confidence building. This also allows girls to generate income which contributes in their livelihoods.

In conclusion, Sihlongonyane's contribution proves that the best way to bring women freedom and development is not about doing big splendid displays, but a personal conviction to start doing something no matter how small it may look. Her contribution may not mean much in the world, but it means a world to those whose lives have been impacted and changed. If as women we commit to struggling together and acknowledging our freedoms, it means nothing if our fellow women are not free. And as we remember that our freedoms are tied together, more women will be empowered and women emancipation will be achieved.

The institution of patriarchy works against women of all ages in eSwatini. Patriarchy has deprived half of the world's population; women and girls, from a fair chance to exercise their fullest potential by marginalizing, restricting and

depriving them of freedoms. Women's voice has been ignored, their experiences left out as if they count for nothing in society. The practices of genital mutilation and child marriage, or being treated as if they are someone's property have further intensified the underprivileged position of women in society.

However, women's survival abilities and resilience have pushed them to keep their heads above water and to counterattack by coming together and working towards emancipating themselves. Generations of feminists have led the way by first making women aware of their plight, and offering guidance in changing this reality. Feminists have therefore drawn the society, especially women, to the assurance that together we can move mountains.

They have worked tirelessly to plead the cause of those women who suffer in silence and augmented the voices of those who took courage and dared to speak and dared to act in order to improve themselves and other women's situations.

A portrait of a woman, Wirba Rashidatu, wearing a white hijab with a blue headband and a blue dress with pink cuffs. She is smiling and resting her chin on her hand, which is adorned with a large, colorful ring and a gold bracelet. The background is a solid green color.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC ANOTHER INFILTRATING DEMISE ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Wirba Rashidatu hails from Bui Division in Cameroon. She has a degree in accounting and a master degree in quality management. However, she has developed an interest for issues related to women, girls and vulnerable people, especially around empowering and sensitizing about gender-based violence. She is an advocate for peace in the muslim-christian community.

Rashidatu considers herself as a multi-talented, self-disciplined purpose driven and funny person.



On December 18, 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It entered into force as an international treaty on September 3, 1981 after the twentieth country had ratified it. By the tenth anniversary of the Convention in 1989, almost one hundred nations have agreed to be bound by¹its provisions. The existence of gender-based violence (GBV) has been recognized as an international public health and human rights issue. An estimated 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical

or sexual harassment.

The world is experiencing health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and many factors can exacerbate the risks of experiencing GBV. In Cameroon, precisely in the two anglophone regions namely North-West and South-West regions, have faced a high level of militarization, displacement, scarcity of essential resources and given the recent COVID-19 pandemic, it has been a crucial call for concern in the area and has brought profound gender inequality and increased level of sexual harassment alongside with rape and economic abuse.

1. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, UN Women, 1979.



The vulnerability of internally displaced people and the total restriction of movement or lockdown due to the virus have increased violence on women especially the girl child to an undesirable level.

In addition, the internal and external displacements have increased the risk of physical and sexual abuses and exploitations especially for women and children who represent respectively 35% and 40% IDPs and refugees.²

Unfortunately, while trying to cope the measures and sensitization on how to eradicate this social ill, appears the COVID-19 pandemic which is a virus that has brought the world on a standstill due to the negative effect it has brought on the populations.

The social distancing and the lockdowns observed globally have opened and enhanced or unleashed gender-based violence and domestic violence, where the victims are mostly women and girls. The abuse has increased while the fear of even seeking for help is a total hinderance since the mindset of the world at large is focused on the pandemic

Anita Bhatia, the Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Women tells TIME that "the very technique we are using to protect people from the virus can perversely impact victims of domestic violence." She added that "while we absolutely support the need to follow these measures of social distancing and isolation, we also recognize that it provides an opportunity for abusers to demonstrate more violence than usual." The figures, published on by the UNFPA and its partners Avenir Health, Johns Hopkins University in the US and Victoria

University in Australia, assume a 20% increase in violence during an average three-month lockdown in all 193 UN member states. The figures take into account the anticipated high levels of under-reported cases. Researchers expect 15 million additional cases of domestic violence for every three months that the lockdown is extended.

The severity of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on GBV in Cameroon at large is a call for concern and chain reaction whereby other arising ills such as a result of the political unrest, unemployment, financial instability and psychological instability have escalated. In the two anglophone regions in Cameroon, Dr Nsame Denise who is the Director of the Regional Health Hospital of Bamenda says "at least 33 cases of GBV are being registered at the Listening and Orientation Unit (LOU) per month, of which 60% is related to rape."³ He further says that "if this unacceptable abuse and practice continues like this then the globe at large will be at the mercy of irrecoverable psychological and emotional damages."

The COVID-19 pandemic is greatly impacting the social aspects within the community. Amongst the the types of GBV, rape remains the most common of all and no doubt a devastating crime. Some women are badly injured, some become pregnant and others may contract HIV. But the emotional trauma can be worse than any physical injury. Women who are raped have nightmares, panic attacks, waves of self-doubt, an overwhelming sense of distrust. "The effect of COVID-19 pandemic on GBV will massively affect the population over a long period of time," says Ms Awah Ndikum, a clinical psychologist.

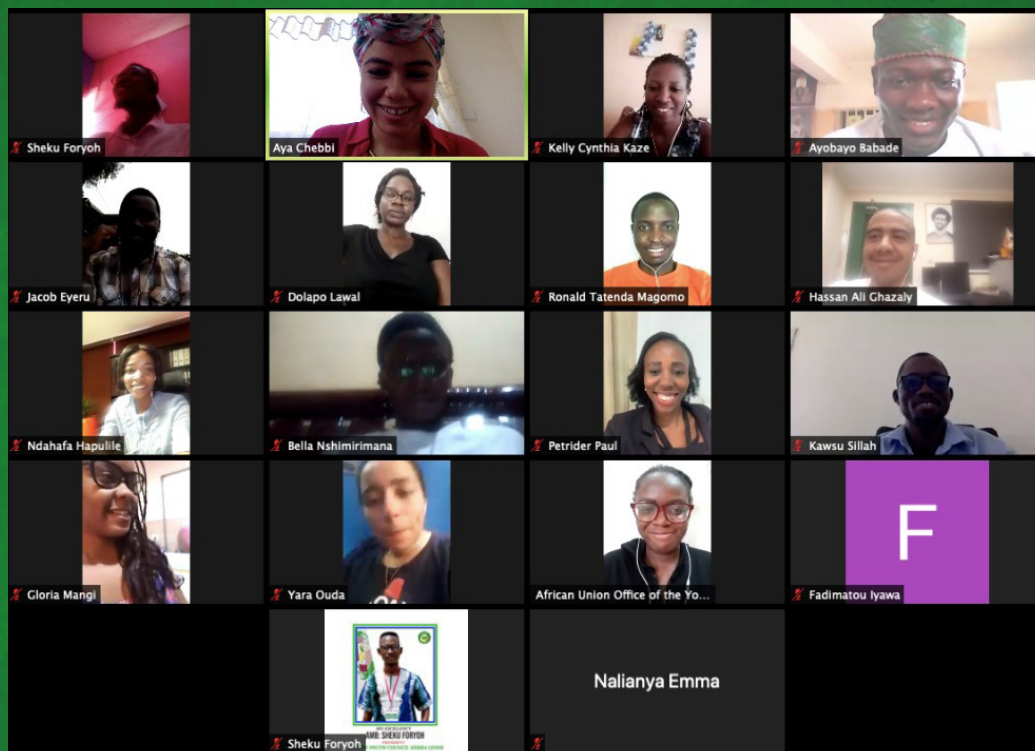
2. Child Protection, Global Protection Cluster, Risks and Needs for Child Protection in Cameroon – North-West and South-West Crisis, Secondary Data Review, April 2019.

3. The Gbv statistic from the Listening and orientation unit- regional hospital Bamenda- Cameroon.



“At the African Youth Front for Coronavirus, out of the 18 members, three are young women-led networks in addition to the strong female representation we have from the other networks. Young women face unique challenges in today’s Africa, many of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Young women, members of the Youth Front, have emphasized in the policy briefs we published that justice is required against sexual violence and child marriage, in addition to support needed for victims of abuse and access to universal and quality healthcare and education. In a nutshell, young women want a free and safe Africa where they are not discriminated against because of their gender.”

Dr. Chiamaka Nwachukwu,
Facilitator - African Youth Front on Coronavirus





I come from a country which is highly diverse, We are a country of immigrants, we've come from all over the world. My mantra has been that our diversity is our strength. I grew up in the village which I called the microcosm of the world. I was enriched by the diversity of my neighbors. I always say to my daughter; be proud to be who you are, be proud to be a Muslim girl, be proud to be African, be proud to be Mauritian and be proud to be a girl of the world. The solution is building your own self-confidence because when you are confident, when you accept who you are, you can face the world.

H.E. Ameenah Gurib

**Former President of the Republic of Mauritius
During Interview with AU Youth Envoy, August 2019**



"The emergence and rooting of COVID-19 in Africa threatens girls' and women's well-being, exposing them to different forms of violence and disconnecting them from vital opportunities such as education and training. It is essential that girls and young women be given the platform like Sauti صوتي to purposefully contribute to the practical solutions to build a resilient Africa. In their voices lies applicable, youth friendly approaches to addressing conventional and emerging barriers to youth empowerment "

Mme. Martha R. L. Muhwezi

Executive Director - Forum for African Women Educationalists

A close-up portrait of a young Black woman with long, dark, braided hair. She is smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a dark red, high-necked turtleneck sweater. The background is dark and out of focus.

SHECURES SANITARY PADS

Mariatu Gbassay Kanu was born in Makeni City in Sierra Leone. She is a graduate in community health and clinical studies from Njala University. Mariatu is the founder and executive director of the Resilient Empowerment and Advocacy of Life Skills (REAL), a transformative initiative for girls to empower them and nurture their impact on their communities about basic hygiene practices.

Mariatu is a peer trainer, and considers herself as an inspiring social speaker and a creative individual. She has the ability to persevere against all odds

We are living in unprecedented times. We know that the economic situation of many people in Sierra Leone does not allow them to stock up food and stay confined.

It is under such circumstances that the government of Sierra Leone declares a nation wide lockdown without ample notice to get the people prepare. As the COVID-19 is a global pandemic rapidly spreading across the African continent, especially in Sierra Leone, I am worried because our health systems are fragile and incapable of meeting the demand to this crisis.

In addition, access to menstrual hygiene products has increased in most regions, but women and girls in many low and middle income countries, such as Sierra Leone, continue to lack access to the acquisition of high quality affordable menstrual products of their choice. In Sierra Leone, where most women use sanitary pads in urban areas, a greater percentage uses clothes to manage their menstrual hygiene, especially in rural communities.

As a result of poor menstrual flow management, many women and girls are held back and miss out on opportunities afforded to their male fellow. In Sierra Leone the fact that, especially in rural communities, women use clothes to collect menstrual blood with no proper hygiene leads to have adverse health effects, including an increased risk of infection.

Left untreated, infections may lead to infertility and death. Mental and emotional stress during menstrual periods when at school is also visible. The girls have difficulties concentrating on learning as they concentrate on their condition, also due to the difficulties in maintaining standards of hygiene, due to inadequate facilities available in some schools such as toilets, water, sanitary napkins, privacy rooms. Sometimes, these girls are obliged to be absent from schools which causes them to perform poorly on their academic work leading to a negative effect to their futures.

Gender discrimination did not appear as a separate issue, it emerged as a cross-cutting factor due to traditional and cultural beliefs. The topics of menstruation and menstrual issues are not discussed with male family members which is a kind of gender

discrimination in silence, due to the male schoolmates ignorance as they take pleasure in teasing, ridiculing and harassing these girls and young women. Also, just like how the Ebola epidemic had devastating effects on young people and particularly striving communities, all signs on the table hint that the COVID-19 Pandemic will do even worse to our girls. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, most menstrual hygiene support programs have been suspended. As majority of the staff are working from homes. Access to common facilities is limited, following enforced lockdowns and even those who could previously afford pads, are financially incapacitated due to the loss of jobs following social distancing regulations.

As much, as I can observe, most adolescent girls and menstruating women are resorting to reuse readily available materials, such as pieces of clothes and mattress cottons that are within reach. While this might seem like a sustainable intervention, improper reuse of such materials poses an extra challenge of infection and other health complications. It is noteworthy that improper is rampant in underserved areas which lack access to clean water, soap and hygiene facilities. This is where most of the underprivileged population are found.

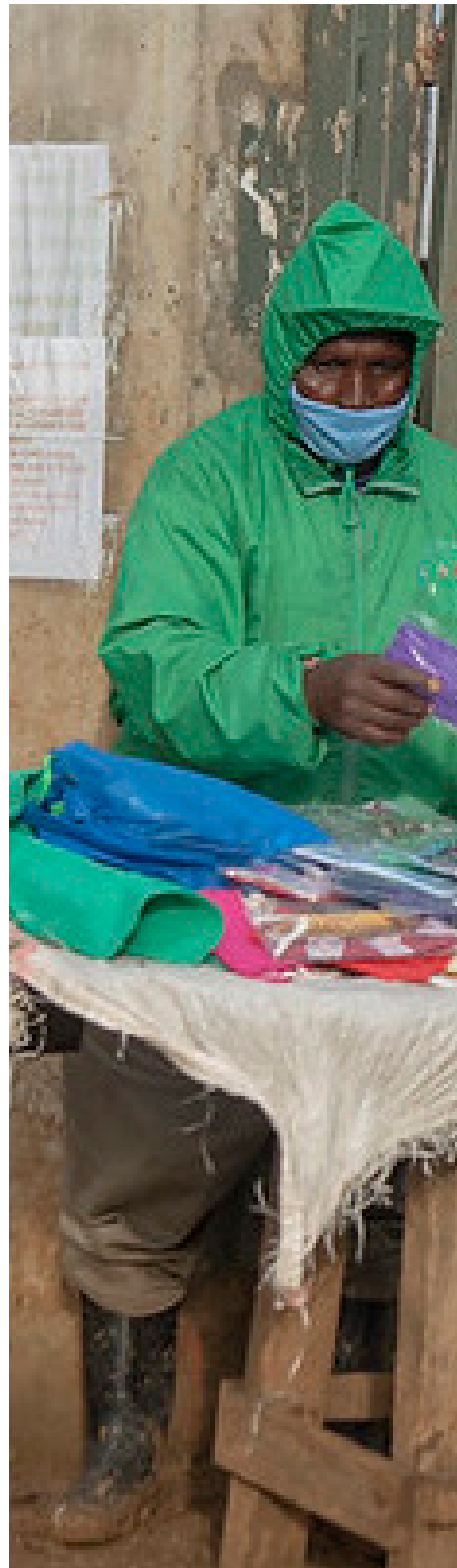
And this is why I have work tirelessly to support young girls in my community by;

- Innovatively design an accessible, leak proof and reusable sanitary pad that reduces the chances of infection and other health complications to the user. The pad design has been easily made at home for the targeted population of 300 girls during the piloting and testing phase. In addition, the materials are biodegradable and readily available in most households with the exception of PUL;
- I want to raise awareness among 100,000 adolescent girls and menstruating women in vulnerable communities;
- I have creatively designed a distribution system for the reusable sanitary pads to ensure they reach the intended users, while observing COVID-19 pandemic preventive measures.

As a young lady with passion for young girls and youths wellbeing in both rural and urban communities I aim at ensuring that social vices, injustices against girls and women become a thing of the past and proper hygiene practices are observed by girls so that they live as responsible people in society.

I see myself as a health activist sharing information and knowledge; believer of the development of the health sector of our beloved nation, especially for striving communities who account for most of the worlds misery. Notwithstanding the fact that even on optimistic assumptions, most parts of the population are still living in poor health conditions and usually found living alongside a relatively prosperous privilege minority.

In my honest truth, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on striving communities and the world's economies can not be over emphasized. We can restore hope to these communities and especially young people if like-minded institutions come to their aid in supporting our dreams so as, we continue making impact in our communities.





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HEALING: AN ENDLESS MAZE

Tlamele Makati is a mechatronics engineering graduate from Botswana. She is the co-organizer of Women in Machine Learning and Data Science Gaborone and GDG Gaborone, and also WomenTechMakers Gaborone. She aspires to be a research engineer in the fields of artificial intelligence and her love for technology has been inspired by the "How to Build a Better Boy" movie, and she has a passion for writing.

Tlamele believes in the existence of the paranormal world including aliens, fae and vampires. She would choose clear skies and the moon over stars and sunsets or sunrises.

"When they ask me if am okay...
With a smile and a high-pitched voice, I nod happily and say
yes!"

To the victims who do not like being labelled as such because
that will be admitting that it actually happened
To the survivors who do not feel like they conquered anything
because they still cannot stomach the touch from them, cannot
love the reflection in the mirror
To the strong ones who can still love and care with their broken
souls

We are not alone, we got each other, we care...

Self - Hate

An inevitable reality for someone like me
Self-forgiveness nonexistent as it is...
It is a disease that slowly consumes you
Leaves nothing but an empty shell of who you used to
be

It was my fault

It hurts when you hesitated
When you questioned me like I was to blame
It hurts when you did not believe me
When you took my pain and made it yours, tossing me
aside...
Made it yours so I was the one apologising, apologising
for "letting" it happen
Apologising and hoping you heal from the scars marring
my body

It hurts when you did not reply
When you were silent
for a week, all I did was pray that you'd forgive me
for what he did

It hurts knowing that I felt responsible for "letting" him
take what was yours
It hurts that I actually believe your silence,
mistrust and ownership of my body is valid
It hurts knowing that I still love you
That I still blame myself
That I cannot forgive myself
Because what he did took you away from me

Months later...

Months later and I still blame myself
Therapy, conversations with HIM, my friends, family
Have done nothing but cover up the pain
Marinated it with your, "It will be ok", "you are stronger
than this"

Months later I still hate myself
Keeping myself busy and pretending to have done
nothing
But make me miss the sharp relief the blades offer

Months later... I still break down at random times
asking myself why? disgusted with myself, regretting
every decision I made that day
loathing my own skin, repulsed by the reflection I see on
the mirror
Months later... and it still feels like it was yesterday

IT

I cannot even bring myself to write about it
Let alone talk about it
"It was an out of the body experience"
I tell myself every day,
"It did not happen to me"
I reassure myself

And then he; with his rough hands, deep voice,
that thing between his legs breathes down my neck
kisses me, touches me...

I stay still and tell myself to breath
To take it all because I'm in control, I can do this!
I travel to that place where I feel nothing
A place where the strong girl I used to be resides
I take control and "enjoy" the moment
For a few seconds, minutes... it is bearable

Then she takes over, broken and scared
with memories, I tell myself she made up
And I crumble, remembering, flashbacks...

My body freezes
The no's stuck in my throat because the last I shouted them
he ignored, they seemed to fuel him... so I stay still, hoping my
stillness does the opposite
"Stop!" I whisper to myself, hoping he magically gets out of this sex
hazed cloud
That he listens to my body language, that he sees the tears
threatening to escape my eyes
His deep voice, rough hands, that thing between his legs...
I shudder, hoping at least he finishes quick
I die a little more inside
Blame, shame and disgust my coffin



Healing (with time)

Time is nothing but clocks ticking
Hourglasses moving soil
The rising and falling of the sun
Day and night...
What the hell does it have to do with my broken self?

With every waking, I pray it be the day
The day time finally delivers and I heal
But each day is a disappointment,
Leaving me as it found me...
confused, broken, empty, numb, sad and angry

One more try

I want to give myself another chance
A chance at love, happiness, at having a family
But the ghosts of my past keep me locked down
Unable to move on, away from them
Moving on feels like a betrayal.

Trapped Air

I wonder how air feels, trapped in an empty box
Does she feel free in the confinements
Or has she become comfortable with the darkness
and the corners
Moving from one to the other blindly
No worries about the "what if I just peak outside..."

I wonder how air sees, trapped in an empty box
Does she have other senses to make sense of her
environment
Can she see the roughness of the box through her
whispers against the walls
Can she smell the emptiness of her home
Or ignorance is indeed bliss?

I wonder if the air knows her potential
I wonder if she knows she can be a sweet breeze
cooling the hush burn from the sun
I wonder if she knows she can be a raging hurricane
destroying everything in her path

I wonder if she thinks she has reached her peak
that moving around randomly is all she is capable of
I wonder if she knows if she blows, moves just a little
faster
she can shake the walls of her confinements
I wonder if she knows that a little push against the
roof
will set her free

I wonder if she knows there is a world out there for
her to explore
I wonder if she knows that she is more than just
trapped air



TOO YOUNG
TO SEE



Yusra EL HADI aka **Yuzzra** is a 22 years old architecture student from Algeria. She grew up in a quite artistic environment which led her to digital arts. **Yuzzra** has been working as a graphic designer and illustrator for the past 2 years. She also spends most of her time practicing, making music and reading poetry.

Yuzzra considers herself as a good tempered versatile person, a perfectionist who is attracted to imperfection and a multitasker. She is also able to sit in the W-position !

Working on this piece has been quite different for me. This artwork shows my personal vision towards child marriage, especially during the Covid-19 sanitary crisis that we're currently going through. The lockdown is having a massive effect on communities, and girls and women are disproportionately affected.

This illustration tells the story of a girl who is still naively enjoying life, she is happily celebrating her 9th birthday whilst getting married to a man with whom she is being locked up. However, she is too blindfolded to understand what is going on around her

Yuzzra



لا للعنف ضد المرأة

Sarah Ali Yusuf is an Egyptian public health worker. She has obtained the Swedish Institute Scholarship for Global Professionals 2020 for a Master degree in public health at Lund University. Sarah is advocates against gender based violence and reflects her work through photography.

Sarah considers herself as a multitasker, she works, studies and raises two daughters at the same time. She is not afraid of change and always looks for challenges. Always knowing what she wants, she sticks tightly to her values



لقد تزايد العنف ضد الفتيات و النساء تزامنا مع انتشار وباء الكورونا، فقد ارتفعت حالات العنف هذه داخل الأسر، فخلال الحجر المنزلي تعرضت الكثير منهن للعنف الجسدي نتيجة للضرب، والعنف النفسي بسبب تلقي الكثير من الألفاظ القاسية. فتحوّلت البيوت إلى معتقل تعذيب للنساء والفتيات يعلو فيه الصراخ. ونتيجة لذلك، تتأثر سلبا الحالة النفسية والجسدية للنساء والفتيات على المدى البعيد أكثر من الرجال بسبب الضغوطات الاقتصادية والاجتماعية والعاطفية التي تحيط بهن. وهذه الصورة تظهر شابة مصرية في مقتبل العمر حيث يرمز اللون الأحمر لغطاء الرأس للعنف والدماء التي تواجه النساء وأما ارتداء الكمامة فيرمز إلى وباء كورونا الذي زاد من حدة معاناتهن

Be Still

Naomi Oyeniyi is a contemporary Nigerian artist with a Bachelor of Arts with honours from the Obafemi Awolowo University with a specialization in painting. She has participated in art workshops and exhibitions. **Naomi** has worked on murals including the creation of the Guinness logo for the Guinness Flavour Rooms Event and the creation of the Ojodu-Berger Bridge mural commissioned by Governor Akinwunmi Ambode.

Naomi Oyeniyi is a very jovial and hardworking person. She loves and helps unconditionally. She tends to forgive other easily !



The breakdown of the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a great imbalance around the world, as all human activities were cut down tremendously leading to a global lockdown, it questions what holds for us and what more to expect in the future.

This painting is a representation of an expectant mother holding a sanitary mask. She depicts the present while the unborn child represents the future. The future relies on the actions of the present as it determines what it should be prepared for.

The brown skinned woman is adorned with African plaited hairstyle and green flowing earring depicting the richness in the African culture. The background has in it icons of the Covid-19 surrounded by the woman with the dark background showing the extent to which the virus has saturated the world and we are to do all we can to bring the unborn child to a cleaner world.

Medium: oil on canvas

Size: 36 x 48 inches

Year: 2020



A portrait of a smiling woman with dark, curly hair, wearing a maroon off-the-shoulder top with a small brooch. She is positioned in front of a dark background with dried flowers and a patterned chair back visible on the right.

UYI

Osazuwa Adesuwa Modupe is a Nigerian ardent believer of storytelling as a transformative tool. She is a final year medical student at the University of Lagos. She has over three years experience working on social impact projects addressing quality healthcare delivery and community development, and she currently serves as the Lead of the Medical Team at Restructure Africa. Adesuwa is also an alumna of Young African Leaders' Initiative (YALI) and has received training in social change leadership from Leading Change Institute of Kansas State University.

Adesuwa enjoys baking and listening to people's stories and experiences. She also looks forward to spending time by herself and has a very beautiful smile !

UYI is a short story that seeks to give an insight into the lives of pregnant women and their mental health struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic. The vulnerability of the pregnancy state is one that requires utmost care and support, including access to good sexual and reproductive health care and mental health services.

With the rise of COVID-19 cases in the world, this has resulted to leaving women in a state of anxiety, doing no good to their mental health. As we explore the life of UYI, we delve into the reality that a number of pregnant women might be going through, perculiary in these tough and uncertain times, as well as the need for support from other women.

Transcript

[AUDIO/VIDEO LINK HERE](#)

My name is Uyi
And I am pregnant!
There is so much going on around me,
So much that I don't even understand.
So I take solace in writing, that's one way I know how to express myself.
So yeah!
I always write
I always put down how I feel, it helps me feel better sometimes.

It's week 32.
God! I am so stressed and tired
I have trouble sleeping and I think I am eating too much.
Maybe I am just being too paranoid, but I don't understand.
I am so worried about my pregnancy.
How am I going to complete it?
Will my baby be okay?
How will I breastfeed?
With all these going on, how?
I so much dread going to the hospital because of this virus
What if i get it?
I spend countless hours checking up the effects it can have on my baby.
I am tired!
I am really tired!

I am also an accountant and I have to work from home.
I have reports to write, submit.
I have deadlines to meet, I can't afford to lose my job this period.
I can't! I can't just afford to
I have two other children, Bobo and Osato.. (mummy, mummy)
They also need my care.
Lest I forget, my husband as well (Uyi is the food ready?)

But I am very grateful for other women like my mother, who understand what I may
be going through and always reach out to me.
Listen to me and show concern for my mental health.
They support me and remind me that I am not alone!
I am very grateful!



VAA MASK, KOMESHA CORONA WEAR MASK, STOP COVID-19 SPREAD

Grace Adhiambo is a 24 years old Kenyan, living in Kisumu Country. She is a Young Women Mediation Ambassador passionate about women, peace and security. Grace is a final year student leader at the University of Nairobi pursuing a Bachelor's in project planning and management. She founded Women Volunteers of Peace Organisation to amplify women voices in peacebuilding and decision making for the world to thrive its fullest potential.

Grace Adhiambo hosts the Girls Talk program that embraces the culture of sharing issues on young women and girls to inspire and improve their mental wellness.

The COVID-19 pandemic signaled an end to my peace building initiative in Kisumu County, as the government banned gatherings and non-essential movement. As an organization working with young women by supporting and promoting their role in peace building activities, the Women Volunteers of Peace Organisation thought of something to do to help people stay safe.

As cases increased in Kenya, the government put a directive for Kenyans to wear face masks whenever in public as a preventive measure against the spread of the pandemic. However, the majority of Kenyans live below two bucks a day thereby spending USD 0.8 on face masks wasn't attainable. This led to cases of harassment by police officers enforcing this preventive measure.

In order to help make masks more accessible, I teamed up with women volunteers to design and tailor cloth face masks. I was supported by tailors in a local market who provided a workshop for use. For the purpose of community ownership, we called for donations of fabric and other resources required and the result was pure love and support. To date, we have distributed over 25,000 masks for free to disadvantaged and vulnerable families including children, street vendors and the elderly.

Transcript

[AUDIO/VIDEO LINK HERE](#)

My name is Adhiambo Grace, I am the founder of Women Volunteers for Peace. We work with women and support the young people into peace building activities that contribute to living in dignity and in dialogue.

In the wake of COVID-19, the youth, especially young women have been in the forefront in preventing and combating COVID-19 virus. At Women Volunteers for Peace, we have been trying to make cloth masks. We make about 100-200 facemasks daily and distribute them to the community for free.

Majorly, our main target group are the children which I think have been left out in the fight of COVID-19, the elderly, people living with disabilities and women in the market doing small and micro enterprise businesses. We reach out to between 100-150 individuals daily in our free mask distribution drive.

The first step of making the masks is designing of the cloth fabric. We cut into the desirable sizes then design. The second phase is tailoring where it is sewed using sewing machine and threads to make the shape of a mask. It is important to note that the masks are made up of two layers. After sewing then the sorting process follows. It is the last step, afterwards, we sort them out. Sometimes we even iron them just to ensure that the shape comes out in a nice and fine way then package ready for distribution.

I believe that when the pandemic is over, what will truly matter is how we treated each other. The world needs more hope, kindness, and love. Therefore, we need to reach out to others who are vulnerable in order to put a smile on their faces.

WHEREVER THE WILDFLOWERS ARE



Shainah M. Andrews aka ShaiYaa is a writer born and raised in the United States of America. She has started writing fiction in second grade and hasn't stopped since. She also writes poetry and nonfiction essays about Blackness through a linguistic lens and healing mental and spiritual wounds. Her work is often an ode to Ghana and the Motherland as a whole. Shainah spent four months studying abroad in Ghana in 2018 which brought her even closer to her ancestral roots; she hopes to return permanently one day. She holds a BA in English and a TESOL certificate from East Carolina University.

Shainah is a pescatarian, meaning that she only eats seafood. She is working towards being fluent in Spanish, and one day in Twi and Swedish. She was pinched by a scorpion while in Ghana. Shainah has flown on a plane more than she has driven a car !

This piece was created with women leading the good, yet heavy, fight in mind. Yes, we are strong and we get the job done. But why should we be forced to do it alone? Women, especially those who are young and part of the African diaspora all around the globe, are being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately; this is due, largely, to systematic barriers implemented by former colonial and current-day capitalist powers.

While this poem was made to uplift and encourage women who have always contributed to bettering the world and are still doing so during this pandemic, it also wants to shed light on reality: the burden of evoking change should not completely rest on the shoulders of women. After all, we all have to live on this planet.

Transcript

[AUDIO/VIDEO LINK HERE](#)

Women kissed by the moon the color of coconut fur the closest thing to cacao in human form have never been the fly on the wall
Have never been the paint just peeling in the coffee shop
Waiting to be repaired
Women
We have always been the spider Spinning webs of success and silk and sustainability in the corner
Without a care in the world for the camera or award
We have always been the painter
Ripping away at somebody else's mistakes and dry rot
The wildflower that will grow back no matter how many times you cut utilities resources paychecks skin

COVID-19 has been like an accelerator to the bottom of many women's feet that I know None of them wanted this pandemic but they did not panic Instead grabbed pans and plantains and coupons and scriptures and curated care packages and mental health groups made peace among pieces cradled more than their own children in their own arms

Our book clubs, you see, are medicine for the mind
Why your favorite rapper can sanely sell out concert halls and now perform on virtual stages for thousands
Our bones why structures are not sinking like sand
Our voices being the very vehicle on the road to recovery
But that does not make it easy
Our crowns are real gold, so they're heavy
Even though we come from a rib marinated in melanin, we cannot cover all of this ground on our own
Clothe every child Make every mask

Our supply has been cut short
Our milk flows a bit more slowly
Our fingertips calloused from the fishing nets casted again and again and again cracked from the worries of the world

The world owes it to the women forced to live in toxicity in this season made to see medical attention as a privilege instead of a basic right have their vocals folded like banana leaves The world owes it to women to stand up against corona but also capitalism greed faces that are blue and green
To implement change
Do away with masks made solely of patriarchy and selfishness

We need more floor plans and less roadblocks
Keys that unlock doors only our faces can walk through
We need help And fast

But the bittersweet part of it all is that we will act and adapt
With or without your assistance That's just how we are How we were created
How we will always cry out and why



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Patricia Lamwaka is a Ugandan artist born and bred under the Africa sun, and is passionate about the shared experiences of her African sisters. She is currently pursuing an undergraduate degree. Patricia appreciates street food and thinks that Laurence Moniasse Sessou is inspiring.

She considers that contexts have the power to change perceptions and that human beings are predictable, meaning in most of our experiences that we are never alone, the difference is that we feel our pain individually.

TO LIVE OR STAY

This work shares the reflections of a young woman who is contemplating whether to stay home or leave because of the violence she faces from a male parent who is unemployed due to the COVID-19 restrictions. This piece gathers the questions that would run through her mind as she weighs the pros and cons of each endeavour.

Eventually she contemplates the other parent. Both with anger about being abandoned and then understood. A duality in essence which is the theme of this work and which has been the general atmosphere that the COVID-19 has created.

Transcript

[AUDIO/VIDEO LINK HERE](#)

A place to rest your head and be accepted. That is

What home means to you. But not to me. Home is a house to me. A house where, I can hold my breath.

In anticipation. Cause I'm waiting for the next fight.

The next time. My skin feels the heat of

A kick, a punch or a slap.

I have learned to act busy and get things done. But this this this quarantine, this lock down. It's taking all I have and then some.

I wonder which will shall hurt more. To stay or to leave? If I stay,

I won't have to be a punching bag.

But.

What happens when the curfew comes into place?

The neighbour's son got caught out past curfew and he was beaten up! Really bad!

Maybe they shall take pity on me,

And let me be.

But how? If I can't be spared in my own home!

I understand. He lost his job, due to the virus and gained a temper. Maybe the anxiety of many mouths to feed got to him. But no job means I am a living breathing visual representation of all his expenses. Mother is supposed to be here.

To protect me, to buffer me; from him.

Maybe I guess she preferred to sleep in the market.

Wait! Nobody wants to choose between home and sleeping next to market produce!

But she has to. To earn a living!

But at least, in the market her nights are not plagued with bodily aches and profuse sweating that accompanies may night terrors. Nightmares!

School was my escape.

Now am in a prison.

A prison called home!

About the African Union Office of the Youth Envoy

On November 1st, 2018, the chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC), H.E. Moussa Faki Mahmmat appointed the first-ever Special Envoy on Youth, Ms. Aya Chebbi with the mandate to serve as a representative of and advocate for the voices and interests of African youth to the relevant African Union (AU) decision-making bodies. Since her appointment, the AU Youth Envoy's office has engaged African Youth on the continent and in the diaspora towards positive social change, intergenerational dialogues and concrete action for Africa's development as underscored in [Agenda 2063](#).

Guided by Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 of "an Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth," the AU Office of the Youth Envoy (OYE) has become a **Pan-African collaborative movement** with a committed volunteer network and AU Youth Advisory Council supporting the office mandate and spearheading regional engagements.

As mandated by the AUC Chairperson, the AU Youth Envoy launched **a game-changer; 2019/20 Action Plan** with Four Models of Action including Advocacy Model that advocates for the ratification and the implementation of the [African Youth Charter](#) as a key continental framework for youth-led transformation. Cognizant of this key role, the [OYE launched](#) a flagship initiative "[The African Youth Charter Hustlers](#)" building a movement of youth-led accountability to contribute to reforming African institutions and service delivery architecture including the improvement of health infrastructures that can prevent and respond to COVID-19 and other pandemics.

In efforts to accelerate results for the youth agenda, the OYE champions with Commissioner of Human Resources, Science and Technology, the [1 Million by 2021 initiative](#) which was launched by the Chairperson of the AUC in April 2019, during the 2nd Pan-African Youth Forum, impacting the lives of thousands of young Africans in Employment, Entrepreneurship, Education and Engagement.

The OYE also champions five themes including Ending Violence Against Young Women, by advocating for the AU campaign to end Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Early Child Marriage (ECM), and more inclusive spaces for young women and girls ensuring that no one left behind. The OYE in collaboration with the Department of Social Affairs initiated the [Saleema Youth Victorious Ambassadors](#) to promote further the AUC Saleema Initiative aiming at eliminating FGM in Africa by 2030.



During the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the OYE immediately adopted the 'new normal' and in collaboration with [Africa CDC](#) convened the **Virtual AU Youth Consultations Series on COVID-19** for Youth Collective Response including 13 focused group discussion with over 400 youth leaders from 42 countries who were able to learn from each other, share best practices and come up with action plans. These were followed by [Eight Intergenerational Dialogues](#) with African leaders where, African Union Commissioners, Special Envoys, AU organs and Regional Economic Communities made commitments to the youth agenda and engaged directly with **over 22,800 youth** who participated and enabled **over 83,000 with timely information**.

As an outcome of these consultations, on May 6th, 2020, the African Union established under the leadership of Commissioner of Social Affairs and Africa CDC, the [African Youth Front on Coronavirus](#), which makes the **African Union the first intergovernmental organization to create** a high level policy and advocacy framework for young people to co-lead Africa's response to the pandemic and engage in decision-making as well as support the implementation of the [African Continental Strategic Plan for COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

The outcomes of the youth consultations were also reported to the [Specialized Technical Committee of African Ministers on Youth Meeting](#) focused on COVID-19 impact on Africa's youth.

On the advocacy efforts for the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, the OYE contributed to 2019 AU Theme of the Year through a [Solidarity mission to South Sudan](#) and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) at POC 3 Equatorial State in Juba, followed by briefings to the [United Nations Security Council](#) and AU [Peace and Security Council](#) (PSC) advocating for young refugees and IDPs. The OYE then supported AUC regional consultations which produced a Study on the Roles and Contributions of the Youth to Peace and Security in Africa; and helped finalize the **Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security**, which was adopted on 23rd June 2020, by AU PSC at its 933rd meeting. In efforts to center African youth in the YPS agenda and 2020 Theme of the Year, the OYE pioneered the Youth [Silencing the Guns Campaign](#) which was launched by Commissioner of Peace and Security and relevant stakeholders to meaningfully engage youth online and offline in achieving the Silencing the Guns agenda.

Throughout these different engagements, the OYE legacy remains to foster a concept of Intergenerational Co-Leadership through Intergenerational dialogues that can be used as a preventive approach to address current and emerging crises and conflicts. The key principles underlying this Theory of Change are trust building, generational solidarity, co-creation and mentorship that can bridge the gap in leadership between political, private and public institutions; and youth especially young women.

Audacious, Resilient, Frontliners

25 young women have expressed their voices, often underrepresented, and their stories, often untold. 25 young women owned their narratives, owned their voices, through these pages, peculiarly their realities, lived experiences, during the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to challenge us, our existence and our struggles at the dawn of this new decade.

Sauti صوتي Publication reflects the inspiring journey of young African women from the mediterranean to the cape and elsewhere, who strive to respond to critical questions of gender inequality. It also reflects their feminisms, their initiatives, their arts, their potentials, their being and becoming.



“ Un leader c’est quelqu’un qui a une vision, c’est quelqu’un qui est comme une tête de train qui draine les autres derrière lui pour mettre en oeuvre et atteindre cette vision [...] En tant que femme, on se sent interpellées parce que nous avons un rôle à jouer dans la communauté [...] En ce moment, nous avons des femmes leaders, mais il faut assurer la relève ”

S.E.Catherine Samba Panza

Ancienne Chef de l’Etat de Transition en République Centrafricaine

Co-présidente de FemWise-Africa

Lors d’un entretien avec l’Envoyée de L’Union Africaine pour la Jeunesse, Août 2019



SILENCING
THE GUNS:
Creating Conducive Conditions
for Africa's Development

SUPPORTED BY



GIRLS
ADVOCACY
ALLIANCE



CIF
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INVESTMENT FUND
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