

'African civil society response to the COVID-19 outbreak; Initiatives and Lessons Learned'



The poster is for a webinar series titled 'African Civil Society Response to COVID-19: Initiatives & Lessons Learned'. It features the African Union logo and the CIDO logo. The text 'WEBINAR SERIES' is in a red box. Below it, the title and date 'Join Us on 11th June at 2:30 pm (EAT)' are displayed. A 'MODERATOR' section shows a photo of Eiman Kheir, Head of Diaspora Division, AU's Citizens and Diaspora Organizations Directorate (CIDO). A 'PANELISTS' section shows six photos of the panelists: Brahim Bilal Ramdane (Mauritania), Rwida B. Matar (Sudan), Jeremiah Villizu (Liberia), Wajdi Belloumi (Tunisia), Adjélé Fata Mensah-D'Almeida (Togo), and Joseph Tsongo (DR. Congo). A 'REGISTER' button with a link is at the bottom left. Social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are at the bottom right.

African Union **CIDO**

WEBINAR SERIES

African Civil Society Response to COVID-19: Initiatives & Lessons Learned
Join Us on 11th June at 2:30 pm (EAT)

MODERATOR

Eiman Kheir
Head of Diaspora Division,
AU's Citizens and Diaspora
Organizations Directorate
(CIDO)

PANELISTS

Brahim Bilal Ramdane
Sahel Foundation for
Human Rights,
Mauritania

Rwida B. Matar
Alharisat Organization,
Sudan

Jeremiah Villizu
Child Resource
Institute,
Liberia

Wajdi Belloumi
IWATCH Organization,
Tunisia

Adjélé Fata Mensah-D'Almeida
ITUC Africa,
Togo

Joseph Tsongo
Amani-Institute ASBL,
DR.Congo

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AU CIDO Webinar series, June 11, 2020 - Panelists: Brahim Bilal Ramdane (Mauritania), Rwida B. Matar (Sudan), Jeremiah Vallizu (Liberia), Wajdi Balloumi (Tunisia), Adjélé Fata Mensah-D'almeida (Togo), Joseph Tsongo (DR. Congo). **Moderator:** Eiman Kheir, Head of Diaspora Division at the AU's Citizens and Diaspora Organizations Directorate.

The African Union's CIDO-supported webinar series focused on community led initiatives from several African countries aiming at bringing attention to their efforts in alleviating the Covid-19 outbreak's impact. On June 11, 2020, CIDO held the 'African civil society response to the COVID-19 outbreak; Initiatives and Lessons Learned' webinar gathering prominent figures from the African civil society to exchange best practices and expertise from different countries in relation to the pandemic and to the great initiatives that were implemented

during the sanitary crisis. The webinar served to promote the role of civil society and provide them with a platform to share their initiatives. It aimed as well to sort out a log for lessons learned and challenges faced by CSOs.

"The webinar helped in amplifying my voice."

Discussion revolved around the impact of the pandemic on the society in order to understand the rational that each organization followed in addressing the issues they faced in their respective countries. The panelists represented the initiatives of their organizations through the explanation of the situations they lived in, the motivation behind engaging in action and the results they achieved.

They also spoke about the different coordination and partnership efforts they led, describing the challenges and difficulties they faced.

"It was a great opportunity to connect with civil society activists from the continent."

African civil society initiatives; mobilization, awareness and modern solutions to face the pandemic

| *Brahim bilel Ramadan – Campaign against fake news on social media – Mauritania* |

Brahim Bilel Ramadan presented initiatives centered around the access, reliability and quality of information. The campaign against fake news on social media included a virtual Discussion about fake news on the most active social media platforms for strengthening activists' knowledge about: International standards on freedom of expression, the notions of the freedom of opinion and the freedom of the expression and the difference between them, the types of the freedom of opinion, among others.

The campaign also covered a virtual awareness campaign through social media pages for protecting bloggers from fake news entitled: "A protection from fake news" and it aimed at strengthening the social media pages activists'

awareness about the danger of fake news, the ways of encountering it and protection mechanisms of fake news, including video recordings of journalists and bloggers raising awareness about the importance of spreading truthful and correct information and the danger of misinformation.

Moreover, through the campaign, a meeting with organizations leaders, youth movements and activists about the protection of bloggers was organized. The meeting discussed the importance of protecting bloggers' freedom and the improvement of their awareness about verifying information reliability, with hope to create a SCO coalition.

| *Rwida B Matar – Al-Harisat (the guardians) – Sudan* |

Rwida B. Matar talked about 'Al Harasat' (the guardians) which is a feminist group that started operating since the early protests of people of Sudan. Its members sought to expand the participation of women in the revolutionary moments. Its members worked in various fields, from the crowd to the media, to field aid and so on.

The group has worked since the start of the processions and had a great contribution to the December 25, 2019 parade. Hence, its members persevered in increasing the number and quality of female participation, as they contributed to attracting different age groups and different professions.

During the outbreak of the Corona pandemic, female guards focused on helping women workers. It tried to provide them with assistance that would allow them to preserve dignity during the curfew period. Female guards focused on providing protective uniforms for hospitals and meals for medical staff, especially maternity departments. In addition to that, in conditions of security and social instability, women are more vulnerable be

assaulted and harassed. Therefore, the initiative was keen to bring these issues to the media, so it designed campaigns through social media to raise awareness about domestic violence and other challenges faced by women in work environment. It used as well radio series that were broadcasted on regional radios and made a movie for the deaf and hard of hearing people in sign language about the Coronavirus and its social impact.

| Jeremiah Villizu – Outreach campaign – Liberia |

Jeremiah Villizu designed a campaign to Mitigate the spread of COVID-19 Pandemic in slums and disadvantaged communities in Liberia. The campaign is an initiative intended to effective public awareness outside big cities where marginalized communities reside. This includes sensitizing citizens to properly adhere to safety measures, avoiding myths and dissemination of genuine information about COVID-19 (signs, symptoms and prevention) and precautionary measures instituted by WHO.

The control of disease spread in slums and disadvantaged (rural) communities remains a

major challenge. The initiative is centered on strengthening and empowering inhabitants with proper information about COVID-19. It is also geared towards reducing domestic violence against women because confinement situation witnessed increasing domestic violence against women and girls.

Jeremiah presented the plan of the campaign when it only started in some regions. The campaign is intended to cover more regions and reach out to more people via radio talk shows and other face-to-face activities.

| Wajdi Belloumi – IWatch organization – Tunisia |

Wajdi Belloumi is the secretary general of a Tunisian watchdog organization, I Watch. The initiatives that were implemented by the organization were mainly technology-based activities that were developed or adjusted to support other NGOs or government institutions' efforts in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Cosante.tn is an E-learning platform that the organization offered to the Tunisian Health Ministry to help train their staff and volunteers online and remotely. Additionally, the organization also provided the Ministry of Health with **Aviscorona.tn** platform, which is a tool to advise people on the potential of being infected with virus or not. It helps the Ministry to address the general panic of the population through a pre-test questionnaire to inform on whether to call the

emergency and Covid services of the Ministry or not. **Billkamcha.com** is a crowd-map that was developed and offered to the Ministry of local affairs to assist the local authorities with identifying the people who did not comply with the quarantine, the curfew restrictions, and those who did not respect the official pricing of certain food elements and services. Citizens will report any transgression they see through the platform. Their complaints will therefore be directed to concerned authorities to investigate and intervene.

The organization also developing Covid19tn and Initiative.tn apps that will be respectively provided to the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Human Rights, constitutional bodies and Civil society. Covid19tn will help track those who are in self-quarantine through their phones and offer a live

chat feature to enable the Health services communicate with quarantined people. Initiative.tn will gather as much as national initiatives enabling accordingly the ministry to coordinate the civil society-led efforts to reach different regions.

Other than these initiatives that were coordinated with Ministries, Wajdi presented a set of online and field campaigns that I Watch has also led. The organization succeeded to create and promote several awareness videos, influencers-led Youtube

campaign and other live sessions with Doctors and government officials in order to provide quality information on the situation, numbers, and measures. I Watch has also led field campaigns to disinfect populated areas such as train stations, hospitals, police stations, etc. and face-to-face campaign to reach out to those who do not rejoice social media presence and may not have adequate access to information in order to raise their awareness about the situation, precautions and measures in place.

| *Adjélé Fata Mensah d'almeida – ITUC-Africa – Togo* |

Adjélé Fata Mensah d'almeida spoke about the Africa section of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa)'s efforts during the pandemic outbreak. First the ITUC-Africa dedicated its new letters to cover a compilation of governments responses to the COVID-19. It has also released a series of press releases to call on African governments to take urgent and necessary actions to stop the spread of the COVID-19. The

organization also proposed key socio-economic interventions to protect workers, and other vulnerable segments of the African societies. ITUC-Africa worked towards providing continuous and active engagement on effective contribution to Government efforts in the fight against COVID-19 through campaigns such as "Wearing of Masks", "PPEs for frontline workers"

| *Joseph Tsongo - Amani-Institute ASBL - DR. Congo* |

Joseph Tsongo a young changemaker activist and Coordinator for **Amani-Institute ASBL**, a socio-cultural youth movement based in eastern DR. Congo. Joseph presented an initiative called « *Tupone wote* » in local Kiswahili translated to « *Heal together* » supported by Amani-Institute NGO which is a socio-cultural movement of young volunteers working for promotion of a culture of peace and sustainable development in eastern the Democratic republic of Congo. Being in a region that is already weakened by active armed groups, the challenge to educate the local communities on preventive measures and the fight against Coronavirus was hard to meet.

The initiative started with regularly producing and broadcasting radio programs including radio spots and soap operas broadcast to mobilize local communities. Several awareness campaigns were also organized on the street and in places where

the vulnerable communities live, in particular people living in makeshift camps fleeing community violence or armed conflicts, and we use megaphones, drawing, songs or printed posters, and guide of conduct under confinement situation. Since preventive measures have an impact on the lives of populations, those already vulnerable needed further assistance. The initiative also worked on setting up a vegetable garden to supply women survivors of sexual violence and other vulnerable people with basic elements of food.

These initiatives combined managed to reach more than 50,000 people via radio broadcast and in-person contact. Gradually, people started adopting responsible behavior. However, the challenges are still enormous because the situation in North-Kivu (DR. Congo) is not helping since people are used to rebel and resort to violence.

Joseph and his team remain positive about the situation in his country and motivated by the active and dynamic youth and their capability to create

small initiative and creative solutions to address such challenges and limit their social impact.