

COVID-19

GNWP Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy and Appeal

June 2020

Country Update

Uganda

Context and government response:

As of May 25, 2020, Uganda has registered over 212 cases of COVID-19, and 0 deaths. The Ministry of Health has been progressively identifying high-risk individuals (including travelers) and placing them under institutional quarantine or self-isolation. The Ministry has also been tracing contact of those with confirmed COVID-19 and expanding testing. Other preventative and early containment measures taken by the Ugandan government include the closure of schools, restrictions on internal and international travel, use of hand sanitizer, improved handwashing stations, social distancing, and lockdown, among others.

Summary of impact:

While the outbreak of COVID-19 has been positively low, the response to COVID-19 and the preventative measures imposed by the government have had grave socio-economic effects. Research reveals that lockdown measures have reduced business activity by more than 50% – with micro and small business economic activities hardest hit. The policy measures – including a ban on the sale of non-food items in Ugandan markets – are disproportionately impacting women – who are overrepresented among market sellers and in the informal economy. The Uganda Women Network expressed “grave concerns” over excessive force and police brutality against informal workers, including women, who continue to sell goods.

Due to deeply entrenched traditional gender norms, women and girls in East Africa are among the most vulnerable groups exposed to the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. As frontline workers and primary caregivers in health facilities and in homes, women are more directly exposed to the virus. They face additional burdens of unpaid domestic work (an average of around 4 hours per day) due to lockdown measures and school closures, and at the same time, are at higher risk of income and job loss. GNWP’s civil society partners in Uganda are reporting increased incidences of domestic violence and abuse faced by women due to lockdown measures - at least two women were killed as a result of domestic violence in Lamwo.

Several other risks threaten to worsen the COVID-19 outbreak in Uganda, including on-going conflict and violence, and lack of access to basic needs - especially in rural and refugee-hosting communities.

Communal conflict – including fatal violence between cattle rustlers from Sudan and Karamoja and populations along the border of Agago, Kitgum, Pader, and the Kamwo districts – continues, threatening an already fragile population.

In rural communities, the lack of clean water, lack of basic medication, and increased food insecurity (due to locusts which are destroying crops), are all contributing to increasing women's security risk and their exposure to the disease by having to travel many kilometers by foot to access water and other basic needs. GNWP's partners have reported that about 600 persons with disabilities, including 300 blind persons, living in the districts of Busia and Isingiro are facing life-threatening challenges in accessing food due to lockdown measures. In addition, due to the national ban on public transportation, persons with pre-existing health conditions or specific needs face increased challenges in accessing life-saving health treatment. For example, persons living with HIV/AIDS in rural communities are unable to access antiretroviral (ARV) HIV drugs; and the movement restriction measures have also limited women's access to sexual and reproductive health clinics, causing the death of a woman in labor who was not able to access maternal healthcare.

Responses led by women peacebuilders:

GNWP's local partners in Uganda report that women peacebuilders are facing extraordinary challenges in their work, including resource mobilization. Despite this, local civil society organizations and women's rights groups are leading working committees ranging from market surveillance, resource mobilization, handling cases domestic and land cases of sexual and gender-based violence and conducting community-level sensitization. The CSO's Women's National Task Force on COVID-19 is also spearheading a data collection process to gather informative evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on women's rights organizations' operations and the communities they work in, from a gender perspective.

The government is expected to begin slowly lifting lockdown measures in the coming days, and civil society organizations, including GNWP partners, are hopeful that the lifted measures will create more space to continue their work in conflict-resolution and prevention, promoting gender equality, and preventing SGBV, including with key stakeholders such as local council leaders and the media.