

Country Update

Rwanda

(February 22, 2021)

Context and government response:

As of February 22, 2021, Rwanda has registered 18,053 cases of COVID-19, including 249 deaths. Following the first case of COVID-19 in the country, a full lockdown was implemented on March 21, 2020. In November 2020, the government began gradually reopening schools, but a curfew restriction remained, as well as limits of public gatherings.

According to a survey by UNICEF and the Rwanda Red Cross Society (RRCS) covering 416 sectors in October and November 2020, misinformation about COVID-19 is widespread, and data shows that some of prevailing misconceptions include: “COVID-19 does not exist; COVID-19 is for rich and white people; COVID-19 no longer exists in Rwanda because measures have become less restrictive; COVID-19 is a political issue, COVID-19 cannot affect people who consume alcohol and; Masks cannot prevent COVID-19.”

Summary of impacts:

Although Rwanda has a high Women’s Power Index (WPI) score of 67, CARE reports that its COVID-19 response has not been gender-inclusive. COVID-19 has severely negatively impacted women’s equal participation in the labor force, as female-headed households and further at risk of experiencing poverty due to the lockdown and women are overrepresented in the informal sector, especially daily wage jobs. In Rwanda, 74% of women are employed in the informal sector, with minimal or no social protection, placing them in a situation of economic vulnerability, as further increase their risk of being subjected to gender-based

violence and sexual abuse. Early data from a study by the International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN) established that women were the first to lose their jobs in 2020 due to COVID-19, as they tend to work on the lowest end of supply chains in poorly paid positions. Women are heavily involved in information and subsidiary trade around mining sites, meaning they have no formal employment protections. Additionally, gender-based employment segregation in the formal sector and women's greater burden of unpaid care have resulted in the disproportionate curtailing of women's economic opportunities by COVID-19. Similarly, authorities encouraged the use of cashless modes of payments during the pandemic to limit unnecessary movements, yet 67% of women do not use these methods of payments, which serves to further entrench men's sole decision-making power over financial resources.

Responses led by women peacebuilders:

In Rwanda, a women-led civil society organization, Ni Nyampinga, which is a multi-platform media company for women and girls has begun to create educational content to spread accurate information about COVID-19. Ni Nyampinga has procured 15 pandemic-related radio shows on Radio Rwanda which broadcasts to 98% of the population, in order to ensure that information and guidelines would reach young women in rural areas, and the organization has also been active on social media. Based on reports from young people around the country, Ni Nyampinga found that young women are facing an increased unpaid care burden during COVID-19, thus they created educational packages and guides, for example on negotiating a fairer division of household chores with parents.

New Faces New Voices has mobilized to respond to the socioeconomic impacts of the crisis by supporting women-led businesses to generate income during the pandemic, and training women trailers to make face masks. As a result of the initiative, 30,000 masks were distributed to vulnerable women and their households in Kigali.

