

InFOCUS



A magazine of the UN in South Africa

Vol. 3, Issue 2. October 2020

United Nations responds to COVID-19



A social contract to tackle the inequality pandemic

Fighting COVID-19 stigma, discrimination and misinformation

The impact of COVID-19 on South Africa



COVID-19
RESPONSE

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InFocus

A magazine of the UN in South Africa
Vol. 3, Issue 2. October 2020

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Message from the Resident Coordinator

This year has been one of, if not the, most difficult for all of us. We might not have personally contracted the COVID-19 virus but certainly all of us have been affected in one way or another. The pandemic continues to have a devastating impact on human lives, it has disrupted health systems, economies, livelihoods and social protection mechanisms across South Africa, Africa and the globe.

At the time of writing this foreword 665,188 South Africans had tested positive for COVID-19, more than 594,229 had recovered, a recovery rate of 89%. However, there were 16,206 deaths as a result of this disease. Each death has been one death too many.

Despite the decrease in the daily positive cases rate, from a high of more than 13,900 to the current rate of a little over 845 today, it is essential to maintain public health messaging and precautions to attempt to prevent a second surge. The pandemic has not disappeared and as my colleagues in WHO have shared, even if we are fortunate enough to have a vaccine this year, it would take a year to vaccinate only the first 2 billion people.

Away from the health dimensions of this crisis, what we have witnessed is a period that has perhaps had the single most devastation on the lives and livelihoods of millions of South Africans, exacerbating existing poverty and inequality, and globally threatening to undo decades of progress. Prior to COVID-19, inequality and poverty were already a pernicious problem in South Africa, with 30.9 million people living in poverty, roughly 55% of the population. In addition, over 8 million people live in extreme poverty, which means they live below the food poverty line and cannot meet their minimum nutritional requirement.

The impact has been severe on groups that we already consider as being left behind. Our Rapid Needs Assessment

has highlighted vulnerabilities across South Africa including:

- a. An estimated 740,616 informal workers are at risk of falling below the upper poverty line.
- b. 13 million children have gone for months without access to education and school feeding.
- c. The incomes of an estimated 2.5 million informal workers in micro enterprises were affected by lockdown.
- d. There are also 266,694 refugees and asylum seekers who currently need assistance, as well as 200,000 homeless people.

Government efforts in response to the socio-economic devastation has been commendable, the public health focused response has been matched with a social protection response, with a R500 billion social and economic spending plan announced by the President in May.

In South Africa, and elsewhere around the world, there is no government that will be able to lead the recovery from this crisis alone. This has necessitated a shift to what the UN has been advocating for even prior to this crisis, a whole-of-society approach to addressing many of the challenges we face. Indeed, a spirit of human solidarity among the citizens of a nation. It has truly been pleasing to see both these elements at play over the past couple of months. Examples range from the establishment of the Solidarity Fund to the overwhelming support this initiative received through donations from corporates, individuals and parliamentarians.

The UN Country Team realized early on that the threat of COVID-19 globally and locally was immense, and that we would have to adjust our plans, responses, method of working and our budgets to respond to this crisis. Globally, under the leadership of the UN Secretary-General

António Guterres and the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN continues to lead and coordinate multilateral efforts to defeat the coronavirus, to work in common towards a vaccine and to ensure that no country or person is left behind.

Around the world, and in South Africa, the UN is seeking to support national efforts that address the emergency response, mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the virus and to build back better.

As you would be aware, we are in the process of finalizing the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for the period 2020-2025. The draft UNSDCF identifies four strategic priorities for the UN over the next five years, namely: (1) Inclusive, Just and Sustainable Economic Growth, (2) Human Capital and Social Transformation, (3) Effective, Efficient and Transformative Governance and (4) Climate Resilience and Sustainably Managed Natural Resources.

As we consider the work we will be undertaking under the new UNSDCF in line with these priority areas, we have to do so cognizant that the impacts of COVID-19 will be with us well beyond this year and will constitute the backdrop of almost all development work for the foreseeable future. As such, the first two years of the UNSDCF (2021 and 2022) will be considered COVID-19 early recovery years, and to this end the Joint Work Plans to be developed for this period should reflect the contribution of the UN Development System to national recovery efforts.

I look forward to your continued support and commitment to strengthening our contribution to South Africa's recovery efforts. There is no greater moment than this for us to demonstrate the real value of the UN to the Government and people of this country. 🌍

InFocus interview with the Resident Coordinator



Nardos Bekele-Thomas

Recently the InFocus magazine interviewed the Resident Coordinator and Head of the United Nations in South Africa, Nardos Bekele-Thomas, to talk about UN's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are excerpts from the interview:

InFocus: What was the UN in South Africa's initial reaction to the presence of COVID-19 pandemic in the country?

Resident Coordinator: The outbreak of the pandemic coincided with the final stages of our Cooperation Framework development process, which defines our work in South Africa in cooperation with the government. As part of this process, we developed the Common Country Analysis [CCA] which pointed us to some of South Africa's key challenges and vulnerable groups. What we often refer to as those who are left behind. Our CCA brought into focus the question of inequality as a dominant feature of South Africa's development landscape and how this reality permeates across all sectors. Our initial reaction was informed by a backdrop of inequality. We knew it would influence how the country would

contend with the pandemic in different sectors like health care, education and more importantly economic livelihoods. With the benefit of hindsight, some of these concerns have come true because what we have seen is that the burden of the health and socio-economic crises has been more pronounced among the poor. We were also worried about the densely populated townships with minimal sanitation facilities and the heightened risks for those who use public transport. These are all manifestations of the inequalities this country faces.

The basis of a response at this scale should be a well-defined needs assessment focusing on the emerging needs per sector. This is something that we advised our government counterparts and the Solidarity Fund. On the basis of this recommendation we were requested to support the process by developing a National Needs Assessment which we were able to deliver with the support of our colleagues at UN headquarters working closely with our agencies in the country. The Needs Assessment is not just an instrument to guide interventions during this crisis but can be used in future if the country confronts another crisis. We are currently working on its digitization to give government a single dashboard for a comprehensive view of the work going on across all sectors.

How has the UN in South Africa responded to the pandemic? What initiatives have you undertaken so far?

What we immediately realized as the UN Country Team [UNCT] was that the pandemic would affect almost all sectors of the economy and society, with the worst impacts falling on health, education and livelihoods. It was therefore important that we formulated a response that would be alive to this reality. This meant bringing

all our agencies on board in thinking through a comprehensive One UN response that looked at sectors in their totality and how we could collectively contribute to those sectors. These include education, food security and nutrition, protection, gender and gender-based violence, health, governance and water, sanitation and hygiene.

An extraordinary response like this is bound to have an impact on the people and the economy. In April, the UN undertook one of the first modelling assessments to understand the impact of the response on the key indicators such as poverty and employment. The report has become an important instrument for understanding the socio-economic effects and has contributed to shaping our response. We also quickly realized that there were many efforts that were being undertaken by various stakeholders and these were highly uncoordinated. We therefore played an important role in coordinating the efforts of all stakeholders. We worked closely with the government, diplomatic corps, the private sector and civil society to ensure coordination, complement each other and avoid duplication.

On the health front our efforts were led by the World Health Organization [WHO]. Our aim was to support and strengthen the health response across South Africa, partnering with a myriad of health actors: from epidemiologists to policy makers and frontline nurses. Our WHO colleagues on behalf of the UN system have been working with district, provincial and national government to strengthen health systems. We were happy to receive a special WHO deployment of a surge team of international experts to advise the Department of Health, to provide guidance, technical support, training

and logistical support, monitoring and planning across all levels of government.

I am proud of our efforts in education. Through our collective efforts as the UN family we supported more than 3.7 million children through home-based learning using mass media and tech platforms during lockdown and reached 6.2 million children with critical COVID-19 messaging and learning resources.

I am particularly pleased with the work we have done with the Solidarity Fund in supporting and strengthening the protection of vulnerable populations in South Africa. A key component is our response to gender-based violence as we played our part in partnership with the government to combat this scourge. These are just a few examples of our responses. Beyond this there are many other examples of our work on maternal health care and our focus on HIV and TB, testing and treatment.

South Africa had been praised for the measures it took to curb the spread of the pandemic. What is your assessment so far?

The government was right to be very concerned about what this pandemic could do. We are still learning about COVID-19 in a country with 7.5 million people living with HIV/AIDs, over 300,000 new TB infections annually and 12% of the population diabetic. Many experts and officials, including the UN, praised President Cyril Ramaphosa's government for its quick response to COVID-19. The country went into complete lockdown soon after it became clear that local transmission had started. South Africa was one of the first countries in Africa to do so. That lockdown gave the Government the time to get its health infrastructure in place and to prepare for the peak period. When the government was satisfied the health facilities were ready, they started relaxing some of the more stringent lockdown measures, including opening up the economy but requiring the mandatory wearing of masks in public places, for instance. Despite all these positive elements we cannot shy away from the one issue that has put a dampener on the government's good response, and that is the extent of the corruption that has seemingly happened

under this period, but we are confident that the appropriate law enforcement agencies will respond accordingly.

What are your concerns for the long-term impact of the pandemic?

There is no doubt that COVID-19 is going to wreak havoc on all economies around the world. And South Africa has been no exception, with 3 million or more jobs lost in the first few weeks, record economic contractions, breaks in the HIV and TB treatment chains and whole industries, such as tourism, in hiatus, it would be wrong to downplay the impact. The lockdowns have led to loss of incomes for many South Africans, worsened poverty levels and widened the inequality gap. Our assessment indicates that without interventions this pandemic could force up to 34% of the middle class into poverty. I am worried that we might lose much of the progress that we have made towards the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs], and that in desperation to restart the economy to address the impact of still greater unemployment on a disillusioned youth, we will lose sight of still greater threats that need to be addressed urgently, such as climate change. In responding to these challenges, we will have to focus our attention on strengthening delivery capacities at local government as the sphere that is closest to the people. In line with this we are committed to working with the Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) to support the roll-out of the District Service Delivery Model. If we get this right, it is a potential game changer for synchronised planning by all spheres of government and making the local sphere the centre of gravity of all government work. This will be crucial in our longer term responses to this crisis, considering the devastation that has occurred to communities.

As an organization, what lessons has the UN in South Africa learned from the COVID-19 pandemic?

As the UN, we believe that the outbreak of the pandemic was a wakeup call for governments to invest in health infrastructure, particularly in Africa. COVID-19 has exposed the underbelly of our economic and social fabric. South Africa has better than average

healthcare infrastructure, but it has had to contend with some of the weaknesses of the system which generally caters to a minority population. We have also learned that in South Africa, and globally, that major changes, in governance, in society, in the economy, can be made quickly and that an informed public will support informed changes. The lesson is when faced with inaction towards some of our greatest challenges – from inequality, to education, to climate change – it is possible to meet a problem head on, to spur radical change and do so with public support. COVID-19 has been a disaster, but it may also be an opportunity to build back better, and address some core, existential challenges facing South Africa.

Do you have any message to South Africans?

COVID-19 has exposed the weaknesses of our development model at a global level and in our case in South Africa. Experts are warning us that shocks could be a common feature to the system going forward, whether they come in the form of health pandemics like this one or through climate-related disasters. If this is the case it means that our planning models must take the risk of shocks into account. Most importantly, we must learn from this crisis on how to mitigate the impact on the most vulnerable in society when moments of crisis do occur in the future. We must focus our attention on rebuilding back better on firm principles of social and economic justice for all. Finally, we have to redouble our efforts to ensure that we achieve the SDGs and the 2030 Development Agenda, these are our only safeguards.

At a personal level, what has been your experience with the COVID-19 pandemic?

The pandemic has affected the lives of every one of us. The UN family has not been spared either. I have had to console my fellow colleagues here in South Africa who had contracted the virus but fortunately all of them have since recovered. Unfortunately, some of my friends, here and in other parts of the world, have either contracted COVID-19 or succumbed to it. It's painful to lose beloved ones to an invisible enemy. But like I said, it's a fight we have won and we shall overcome. 🌈

Interview with the head of IOM

By Lily Sanya

The following is an interview given to InFocus by the Head of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) office in South Africa, Lily Sanya.



Lily Sanya

INFOCUS: How is IOM responding to COVID-19 and what is determining your response?

LILY SANYA: The International Organization for Migration is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society as a whole. We act in partnership with the government, sister UN agencies, and partners, to assist in meeting the growing operational challenges of migration management, advance understanding of migration issues, encourage social and economic development through migration, and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

South Africa has been affected by COVID-19 to a much greater extent than other countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region in positive cases and deaths. Many migrants in South Africa have been facing the socio-economic impact of restrictions related to the COVID-19 national response. This has created financial problems, with many of them

increasingly expressing the wish to return to their countries of origin, though lacking the means to do so.

In collaboration with other UN agencies, IOM is working to complement government's efforts and partners to ensure that migrants are included in all aspects of COVID-19 preparedness and response efforts. IOM is also coordinating closely with embassies in South Africa, on both immediate and long-term strategies for addressing the issues faced by their nationals due to the health crisis, and its socio-economic impact.

What have been your agency's main accomplishments so far and what has been the impact of your work?

To respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, IOM repurposed its existing programmes in the areas of migrant health and assisted voluntary return, and aligned them to the following areas: risk communication and community engagement, partnership and coordination, infection prevention and control, and addressing socio-economic impact of COVID-19.

Among the programmes repurposed since the outbreak of the pandemic was awareness raising on sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV (SRHR-HIV) among migrant communities in South Africa. This involves recruiting, training, and deploying of teams of 'change agents' into the communities, to promote better sexual practices among all demographics, and inform the masses about the various health services available to them. IOM has disseminated COVID-19 preventive messages through radio programming and other communication platforms.

Migrants and asylum seekers often find themselves in position of irregularity, and are rarely included in social support

mechanisms in host countries. Since March, we have worked closely with the Government, foreign embassies based in South Africa and established a taskforce to respond to the many requests for assistance from their nationals.

To date, we have assisted the voluntary return of more than 300 Zimbabwean and Malawian migrants to their home countries. This assistance also involved health screening, distribution of personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves, and hand sanitizers, and the provision of nourishment for their journey home, as well as for the duration of their mandatory quarantine period once back in their countries, before they can ultimately reach their home communities. And our office's Medical Unit is serving as a COVID-19 screening and testing centre.

What are the challenges your agency is facing and how are you responding to them?

Our agency has continued to receive requests for assistance from embassies, migrant associations, faith-based organizations, and other stakeholders for migrants affected by the lockdown. This humanitarian requests range from rent to food and transportation back to their countries of origin. It has been challenging to respond to all these requests because we don't have sufficient resources.

Another challenge we have noted is the lack of credible data on migrants, as several embassies could not give an indicative figure of their nationals in the country. When tackling any matter, it is important to be able to assess both the size and the nature of the issue. For this, qualitative and quantitative data are necessary. However, such data on migrants have always been difficult to gather.



IOM Staff checks temperatures

To respond to these resource challenges, we have repurposed our existing programmes to provide direct assistance in collaboration with the European Union. We have also submitted a proposal to the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations for provision of humanitarian assistance in South Africa. We have also engaged with United Way, who have committed to providing food assistance.

To respond to the data shortage, we are working various embassies of SADC and migrants communities, and through the use of technology, reaching out to migrant communities in the country with a survey aimed at a better understanding of migrants' challenges and needs in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis.

How has been your working relationship with partners including the government and civil society organizations?

IOM's ongoing partnership with the government, SADC embassies, partners, UN agencies and related civil society organizations has been key to all our

initiatives in South Africa, and more recently for the COVID-19 response. We really wish to express our gratitude to all our partners for their commitment to the collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic and addressing the challenges migrants face in South Africa.

What lessons have your agency learned from responding to COVID-19?

To address COVID-19, we have learned that there is that the safety of our society as a whole, depends on the effective protection of the most vulnerable. COVID-19 does not discriminate in terms of race, nationality, social status or lifestyle preferences. The impact of the crisis can reach all, and it has. This is why "solidarity" and "inclusion" have to be at the basis of a thorough approach to collectively mitigating the challenges in South Africa, and the world. Jobs and incomes have been lost for both local and foreign nationals, and misinformation on the relationship between the coronavirus and migration and migrants continue to be a concern to IOM and the UN country team. It is important to ensure that no vulnerable groups are left out of all

preventive and responsive mechanisms against COVID-19.

At a more personal level, what has been your experience working in South Africa during this global Covid-19 pandemic?

Much recognition goes to the Government of South Africa, for its pro-active, inclusive, and adaptable approach to responding to COVID-19. The government has managed to harness the population's resilience, and establish efficient response mechanisms via internal resources channelled through the solidarity fund, but also through partnerships with the private sector, the civil society, and international organizations, including UN agencies.

The task ahead is quite sizable, and it is difficult to foresee the duration of the impacts of COVID-19 in South Africa, in the region, and worldwide. IOM, as a member of the UN country team, is committed to complementing the efforts of the government to address the impact of the scourge of the pandemic on the communities in the country. 🌍

South Africa's AIDS response programme continues apace

South Africa remains focused on its ambitious strategy of ending the AIDS epidemic as a threat to public health by 2030, despite the additional burden of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The country continues to pursue the rapid expansion of HIV testing and treatment, alongside the COVID-19 response.

The United Nations Joint Team on HIV/AIDS in South Africa, led by UNAIDS, is working with the government, civil society, the private sector and international development community to ensure that the needs of people living with HIV and tuberculosis remain central to health care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Minister of Health, Dr. Zweli Mkhize, has reiterated the need to ensure that the AIDS response continues without disruption, including scaling up testing and treatment for people living with HIV. "We had already started a programme to achieve our 90-90-90 goals in 14 of the 52 districts and we cannot allow this pandemic to disrupt all these efforts and the successes and achievements we have already scored," he said early this year during the launch of the UN in South Africa emergency flash appeal. Dr Mkhize welcomed the focus of the UN's COVID-19 response plan on nearly 10 million people in greatest need, including people living with HIV, migrants and refugees, women and children affected by violence, and communities facing shortages of food and other essentials.

Although there is currently no clear evidence that people living with HIV are at an increased risk of acquiring COVID-19 or of becoming more ill from it, many people living with HIV are ageing or have other underlying health conditions

including tuberculosis, heart disease or lung disease, which are known to increase the risk of severe COVID-19 infection.

Dr. Mkhize noted that South Africa has multiple challenges including inequality, unemployment, poverty and densely populated areas and chronic overcrowding in metropolitan areas that are heavily affected by COVID-19. UNAIDS is working closely with civil society to survey people living with HIV, in order to better understand their needs and how the COVID-19 response is affecting them, including access to HIV prevention, testing and treatment and related health and social services. The survey results will inform a dialogue led by people living with HIV to find joint solutions.

Some health facilities have reported that patients have not kept scheduled appointments during the national lockdown that started on 26 March, but there is hope that the 5 million people living with HIV and accessing treatment will return to clinics under eased lockdowns, or once their supplies of medicine run low.

South Africa is now dispensing antiretroviral medicines for three months and pilot testing six months to help reduce the need for repeat visits to health facilities. Some partners are also exploring home deliveries and other methods to bring services closer to people, and efforts are underway to mobilize communities and remind everybody that health facilities remain open for HIV prevention, testing and treatment services.

UNAIDS staff operating in provinces with a high HIV burden are working

with COVID-19 command centres and supporting community health workers actively engaged in screening, contact tracing and voluntary testing. In Northern Cape for example, UNAIDS engaged private psychologists to provide free mental health support to frontline workers dealing with cases of gender-based violence, and supported a funding proposal for local companies to benefit the local civil society response to COVID-19.

In Kwa-Zulu Natal, UNAIDS has helped develop a mobile app for gathering data on service delivery including food, water, welfare support and health services, as well as holding stakeholder discussions on the impact of COVID-19 on HIV and TB services and supporting a WhatsApp group on gender, where issues are raised and cases are referred for support.

Members of the UN Joint Team on HIV/AIDS are reprogramming up to half of their HIV funding and revising approaches to ensure that their HIV work reflects the increased challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes ensuring that civil society, people living with HIV, key populations and vulnerable communities continue to be supported in the AIDS response while also addressing challenges they face including the loss of income and food security. The UN is providing technical support to civil society and resource mobilization through its emergency flash appeal.

The UN has actively engaged with civil society networks, some of which have been established to coordinate responses to the pandemic, such as the C19 People's Coalition and the COVID-19 Front, and long-standing networks including the South African National AIDS Council

(SANAC) Civil Society Forum and the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) Community Constituency. Their plans include a strong emphasis on advocacy, communication and social mobilization around issues such as medical care, shortages of food and fresh water, crowded housing conditions, homelessness and loss of income.

UNAIDS Country Director for South Africa, Mbulawa Mugabe, emphasized the importance of using lessons from the AIDS epidemic to put people at the centre of the COVID-19 response. “We need to make sure that we act with purpose and speed,” he said. “Communities have mobilized themselves and are determined that people who need services should have access to them. It is important to protect the progress in the AIDS response to date and continue achieving the HIV prevention and treatment targets for 2020.”

UNAIDS is working with the Department of Health, primary recipients of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief in an effort to safeguard access to HIV services and promote multi-month dispensing of antiretroviral therapy.

UNAIDS is also working with Reckitt Benckiser, a maker of personal hygiene products, to distribute thousands of “hygiene packs” to people living with HIV across South Africa and Eastern and Southern Africa in order to reduce their risk of acquiring COVID-19. The packs consist of a three-month supply of Dettol soap and Jik surface cleaner and are being distributed by networks of people living with HIV and UNAIDS offices in 19 countries.

The Eastern and Southern Africa region has the biggest burden of HIV globally, with 20.6 million people living with HIV in 2018, yet many countries in the region have fragile health systems and extreme socio-economic inequalities.

UNAIDS is working with government, civil society and development partners

to encourage people living with HIV to take precautions to reduce exposure to COVID-19 and to contact their health care providers to be sure they have adequate supplies of essential medicines, as well as following government guidelines on personal hygiene and social distancing. The COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to quicken the pace of HIV prevention, treatment and care services to avoid falling behind in national targets to control HIV and TB. It is also an

opportunity for service integration to accelerate the goal of the National Health Insurance towards Universal Health Coverage.

UNAIDS is supporting SANAC and the National Department of Health to evaluate and address the impact of COVID-19 and related measures on communities and their health facilities and to ensure that the populace, especially people living with HIV, continue to access essential services across the country. 🌍

What people living with HIV need to know about HIV and COVID-19

COVID-19 is a serious disease and all people living with HIV should take all recommended preventive measures to minimize exposure to, and prevent infection by, the virus that causes COVID-19.

As in the general population, older people living with HIV or people living with HIV with heart or lung problems may be at a higher risk of becoming infected with the virus and of suffering more serious symptoms.

We will actively learn more about how HIV and COVID-19 together impact on people living with HIV from countries and communities responding to both epidemics. Lessons in rolling out innovations or adapting service delivery to minimize the impact on people living with HIV will be shared and replicated as they become available. Until more is known, people living with HIV—especially those with advanced or poorly controlled HIV disease—should be cautious and pay attention to the prevention measures and recommendations. It is also important that people living with HIV have multimonth refills of their HIV medicines.

Precautions that people living with HIV and key populations should follow to prevent COVID-19 infection

Stay safe

- Clean hands frequently with soap and water (for 40–60 seconds) or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (for 20–30 seconds).
- Cover your mouth and nose with a flexed elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue away after use.
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has a fever or cough.
- Stay home when you are ill.
- If you are experiencing fever, a cough and difficulty breathing and have recently travelled to, or are a resident in, an area where COVID-19 is reported, you should seek medical care immediately from your community health service, doctor or local hospital. Before you go to a doctor’s office or hospital, call ahead and tell them about your symptoms and recent travel.
- If you are ill, wear a medical mask and stay away from others.

Stay informed

- Know the facts about COVID-19 and always check a reliable source, such as the World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

Be prepared

- You should have a supply of your necessary medical supplies on hand—ideally for 30 days or more. The World Health Organization HIV treatment guidelines now recommend multimonth dispensing of three months or more of HIV medicines for most people at routine visits, although this has not been widely implemented in all countries.
- Know how to contact your clinic by telephone in the event that you need advice.
- Know how to access treatment and other supports within your community. This treatment could include antiretroviral therapy, tuberculosis medication (if on tuberculosis treatment) and any other medication for other illnesses that you may have.
- Key populations, including people who use drugs, sex workers, gay men and other men who have sex with men, transgender people and prisoners, should ensure that they have essential means to prevent HIV infection, such as sterile needles and syringes and/or opioid substitution therapy, condoms and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). Adequate supplies of other medications, such as contraception and gender-affirming hormone therapy, should also be obtained.
- Not all countries have implemented policies to allow for longer prescriptions. Be in touch with your health-care provider as early as possible. Consider working with others in your community to persuade health-care providers and decision-makers to provide multi-month prescriptions for your essential medicines.
- Discuss with your network of family and friends how to support each other in the event that social distancing measures are put in place. Make alternate arrangements within your community for food, medicines, care for children or pets, etc.
- Help others in your community and ensure that they also have an adequate supply of essential medicines.
- Check that you know how to reach your local network of people living with HIV by electronic means. Make a plan for telephone and for social media connections in the event that public health measures call for people to stay home or if you become ill.

Support yourself and people around you

- The outbreak of COVID-19 may cause fear and anxiety—everyone is encouraged to take care of themselves and to connect with loved ones. People living with HIV and their communities have decades of experience of resilience, surviving and thriving,

Stop stigma and know your rights

- Stigma and discrimination is a barrier to an effective response to COVID-19. This is a time where racism, stigma and discrimination can be directed against groups considered to be affected.
 - Your workplace, access to health care or access to education, for you or your children, may be affected by the COVID-19 outbreak if social distancing measures are put in place in your community. Find out your rights and make sure that you and your community are prepared.

Treatment of COVID-19

- Treatment of COVID-19 is an active area of research and several randomized clinical trials are ongoing to determine whether antiretroviral medicines used for treating HIV might be useful for treating COVID-19. Many other possible treatments are also being tested in well-designed clinical trials. Since those trials have not ended, it is too early to say whether antiretroviral medicines or other medicines are effective in treating COVID-19. A recent clinical trial showed that there was no substantial benefit of using Kaletra to treat COVID-19.

Women at the Centre of building back better in the face of COVID-19

By Anne Githuku-Shongwe



Anne-Githuku Shongwe

With each passing day, South Africa and the world are grappling with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic in every aspect of life. The impact of the pandemic on women and girls has deepened inequalities in access to livelihoods, heightened the threat of violence and further marginalized those with limited technological resources. As we respond and begin to repair the erosion this pandemic has caused, we need to build back better. Keeping a gender lens on has never been more critical to realizing the vision of a thriving society.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-led Socio-Economic Impact Assessment identified the deep economic challenges brought about by COVID-19. The assessment singled out female-headed households as the most vulnerable and likely to lose livelihoods. The economic fallout is felt by women in both formal and the

informal sectors, as well as those with more established women businesses and farms. On both fronts, while there has been provision from the government's ambitious economic stimulus package, it has been much easier for larger and more established businesses to access the relief measures than for informal businesses.

A study by UN Women on the experiences of women-led micro-entrepreneurs supported under the agency's Accelerating Women Micro-Entrepreneurs (AWOME) Programme revealed that many women who dominate the informal sector in Limpopo Province's urban and rural areas could not access relief assistance. This was mainly because the online application process was a barrier to women who lack tools and digital skills to effectively benefit from the service. The relief that reached most of these women was from the Department of Agriculture and Land Reform because the department allowed manual applications and provided hands-on support at the local level.

Other barriers identified in the study were lack of business registration as the government requires registration as a prerequisite to qualify for support. AWOME Programme is partnering with the local government to address some of the barriers in an effort to enhance support. More partnerships are critical to urgently bridge the gaps as in most cases, women are the sole breadwinners.

The vulnerability of women who work in the informal sector is not new but has been intensified by COVID-19. The pandemic has affected women differently based on their socio-economic status and

on the existing inequalities that directly affect them. Many women in South Africa work in the informal economy, earning and saving less, with no adequate social protection and at greater risk of falling into poverty. UN Women and its partners are conducting a rapid assessment of women in the informal sector in collaboration with the Department of Social Development and other relevant actors. This will ensure that women are included in the various supply chain databases and special socio-economic rescue initiatives to preserve their livelihoods, to identify their social protection needs and potential whenever possible, and to maximize their recovery in a post-pandemic era.

Women's economic empowerment remains a strong pillar of the National Strategic Plan on gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF). UN Women provides technical support to the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities to accelerate implementation on all fronts. According to the South African National Income Dynamics Study's Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey, approximately 2.5 million to 3 million people lost their jobs between February and April 2020, with women being the most affected, accounting for approximately two thirds of the jobs lost.

When the loss of income is added to the fact that most household are headed by women, it becomes clear that women's economic empowerment should be at the centre of the COVID-19 response as it has the biggest trickle-down effect on national poverty. In this context, UN Women and its partners has successfully facilitated the provision of a Crisis Response Business Coach and Mentor to women-

owned businesses which gives real-time information and advice on how to manage businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is important that relief measures must ensure that women-owned enterprises in formal and informal sectors have access to knowledge, information and tools to sustain their businesses during and post-COVID19. We need to simplify the connection between the resources the state has allocated and the needs of women businesses. The recent Presidential pronouncement to allocate 40% of preferential procurement to women-owned businesses is a good step in the right direction as it will reduce economic disparities and ensure sustainable economic growth.

The burden of economic hardship is occurring while women are particularly vulnerable to GBVF and possibly HIV/AIDS transmissions during the various lockdown stages. Cases of GBVF are on the rise as access to lifesaving support and care for survivors is destabilized. Mitigation efforts need to focus on enhancing GBVF response during the pandemic. Through its work with the government and partners, UN Women has been focusing on redefining the emergency referral pathways, ensuring that GBV services are treated as essential services while strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations.

Grass-roots community mobilization remains at the heart of all mitigation efforts. While high-level interventions are critical, tackling individual cases through community organizations has immediate impact. The Young Women for Life, supported by UN Women's HeforShe programme, worked hand in hand with community agents to distribute food door-to-door to over 1,400 families living with HIV as well as monitor their adherence to anti-retroviral treatment.

While the COVID-19 pandemic's social and economic impact is amplifying deeply entrenched gender inequalities, it offers an opportunity to build back better and

correct the unequal gender dynamics that have been at play before this crisis. Government's commitment to expanding women's economic participation by setting aside 40% of public procurement to women-owned businesses is an opportunity to build on.

The collaborative platform of the GBVF plan and the promising work emerging with faith-based organizations, the creative

industry and men gives us some hope. We need deliberate, proactive and targeted approaches to the challenges we face. Any reform agenda must be women centred as this will go a long way in helping us rethink, reimagine and reboot in a sustainable manner.

Anne Githuku-Shongwe is the Representative of the UN Women of the South Africa Multi Country Office 🌍



Working with the environment to protect people

C COVID-19 is a reminder that human health is linked to the planet's health. Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people. They account for seventy-five percent of all emerging infectious diseases. A spike in hazardous waste such as PPEs, electronics and pharmaceutical, masses of waste water and massive use of detergents, disinfectants and antimicrobial solutions will have adverse effects on human and planetary health. While there's a clear need to focus on an immediate response to COVID 19, we cannot lose sight of environmental sustainability.

In recognising the importance of efficient waste management as part of the Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) response to COVID 19, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

in South Africa is convening a national multi-stakeholder COVID-19 waste management platform. The platform consists of 70 representatives drawn from UN agencies, Private Sector, Civil Society, Academia and Government. The purpose of the platform is to support more effective and coordinated approaches to safe and environmentally sound waste management in the immediate response to the pandemic and laying the foundations in building back better for achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda. The aim is to assist the more impoverished sectors of society, especially those at the frontline of dealing with waste which might be COVID-19 contaminated.

These partners coordinate response around four priority areas, namely (i) Integrating waste pickers to reduce risk

of exposure to COVID-19 (ii) Increasing the capacity and support for municipal waste management under COVID-19 (iii) Promoting public awareness, education and communications (iv) Developing local enterprises to produce useful PPE items.

With a headcount between 60 000 and 90 000 and saving South African municipalities around R750 million annually, waste reclaimers are major contributors in the South African waste management economy and system even under COVID 19. Waste reclaimers are currently not classified as an essential service and therefore either operate illegally or have lost their source of income. The platform advocates for the urgent need for waste reclaimers to be fully integrated into the country's solid waste management systems as frontline workers, remunerated justly and fully



Waste pickers preparing lunch during Level 5 Lockdown in Newtown, Johannesburg @Jay Groat



Informal waste picker settlement on the outskirts of Johannesburg CBD - Lockdown level 5 @Jay Groat

equipped to decrease reclaimers' risk of exposure to COVID-19 & ensure that reclaimers can work safely.

South Africa generates around 54,2 million tons of solid waste every year. Of this 54,2 million tons, only 61% is collected by local authorities, 5% is dealt with through other means such as burning whilst the remaining 34% is disposed in communal illegal dumping sites.

With the increased in waste generation due to COVID 19, the pressure on already strained municipalities has increased. This focus area addresses the systemic weaknesses in South African municipal waste management systems. This includes ensuring the safety of waste workers in the formal and informal waste economy, capacity development and investment in core infrastructure and technology, mobilizing action in key hot spots, access to waste management

services for all citizens and replication and scaling up of lessons learned.

Current public awareness has reached over 6 million people in South Africa via print and online media. An education and awareness programme has been launched that focuses on the science behind the virus, how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at school and in communities and how to deal with the waste from COVID-19, to ensure we don't spread the virus, and don't negatively impact on the environment has been launched. Surveys to evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 awareness campaign, targeting households, workplaces, schools and waste pickers have been launched.

During this period, thousands of SMMEs have been severely impacted. Through the platform member WESSA, 15,000 SMME's have received training on business development, how to

access targeted finance and developed skills to produce PPE's using recycled materials.

Key achievements so far include equipping 30,000 waste reclaimers with PPE's to reduce contracting COVID 19, standardization of the specifications of PPE for waste reclaimers, harmonizing national with international guidelines including WHO guidelines, facilitating coordination between National Departments and other stakeholders and fostering collaboration with European partners on COVID-10 waste management response.

The impact of COVID-19 is transforming the way we live, from one day to the next. While national and local interventions are largely focused on protecting lives and economies, management of hazardous waste is essential to minimize long-term risks to human and environmental health. 🌍

Youth innovating for employment and community upliftment

By Ayodele Odusola, Resident Representative UNDP and Jama Gulaid, Acting Representative, UNICEF (March 2020 – August 2020)



World Creativity and Innovation Day (21 April) saw the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) celebrate young people innovating to respond to Covid-19.

Allan van der Meulen, 24, grew up hard on the Cape Flats. In a context of gang violence, little hope and even less opportunity, things could have gone a very different way.

Yet, lured by jazz music to a workshop as a teenager, Allan started on a journey of innovation that would change the lives of thousands of young people from some of South Africa's most marginalized communities.

With support from RLabs, the social enterprise that hosted the workshop, Van der Meulen went on to co-launch Zlto, an award-winning digital rewards web-app that has helped over 2 million people get on in life through innovation, technology and education.

Zlto, pronounced "Zlato" and meaning "gold", uses blockchain technology to give online rewards for volunteering, learning and doing good. Rewards can

buy groceries, clothes, mobile data and more.

The main aim of Zlto, however, is linking youth to work opportunities, providing them with the foundations needed to build their careers.

Zlto helps to break the barriers young people face when looking for work by giving them verifiable skills, work experience and by helping to cover the costs of job hunting – such as travelling to interviews.

Across South Africa, a fast-growing Zlto community is promoting safe and healthy actions to fight the coronavirus, and is gaining rewards for handwashing, cleaning their homes and caring for loved ones. Zlto users are also gaining access to free courses on health, hygiene, life-skills and money management, and through Zlto, are linked to coronavirus prevention information.

More than this, and in a heart-warming and admirable show of solidarity, Zlto users have gifted food vouchers to hard-hit households, and over 500 vulnerable senior citizens have received electricity vouchers from young Zlto users that they have never met.

Earlier this year, Zlto was one of five winners of the global UNDP and UNICEF Big Think Challenge, which rewards ground-breaking innovations that support the Global Goals for Sustainable Development through accelerating shared prosperity to end poverty, protecting the planet and boosting peace and stability by 2030.

Looking forward, with support from UNICEF and the UNDP, the Zlto team is committed to saving lives and livelihoods in the face of COVID-19, and aims to reach another 100,000 youth, produce a data-free interface and boost access to the platform through a range of instant messaging services.

As we fight Covid-19 together, Van der Meulen's story shows how empowering energetic young leaders and investing in life-changing innovations – not only in crises but at all times – benefits everyone.

As Van de Meulen says, "Zlto isn't a handout. It's about dignity, helping young people make the best of their lives."

Dr. Odusola is the UNDP Resident Representative in South Africa and Jama Gulaid is the acting UNICEF Representative in South Africa. 🌍

Playing for climate action during lockdown

People around the world – especially youth – are demanding climate action. While governments are faced with making urgent and bold decisions to tackle the climate crisis, the message from young people does not always reach the relevant leaders and policy makers.

In February, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched “Mission 1.5” to bridge the gap between people calling for urgent climate action and governments and policymakers. Mission 1.5 is both a mobile game and survey that educates millions of people about climate solutions and then asks them to choose their priorities for their country. For example, people can choose to prioritize clean energy, increasing green investments or protecting oceans. Once the votes have been cast, UNDP works with partners to collect the results of how people voted and then delivers them in tailored reports to respective governments.



Through Mission 1.5, people have the opportunity to connect in conversations with governments and policymakers while gaining a better understanding of how others are envisioning their future. The information collected through Mission 1.5 can aid governments in developing bold and responsive policies that closely reflects people’s demands. This year’s Earth Day, recognized on 22 April, came at a time when the global impact of the Covid-19 crisis was just beginning to be felt. Millions have since been affected by the isolations, lockdowns and school closures that have become features of the new reality faced by all people around the world.

While so many are indoors, Mission 1.5 is a fun tool for young people to use to pass the time, and also serves as a great way for parents to start a conversation around climate change with their children. With more and more children and young people inspired by the actions of the Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg – as well as South Africa’s very own Ayakha Melithafa – there are growing calls for climate action worldwide, and resources which engage young people on climate change during the Covid-19 pandemic are critical. This time is also a critical moment for citizens’ voices to be heard as countries begin to question how people have been living and start to imagine what the world could look like after the pandemic.

This year’s Earth Day, our Mission 1.5 campaign called, “Stay Home & Play for the Climate this Earth Day,” called on people around the world to stay home while playing and learning about solutions to tackle climate change. As the lockdown eases, playing for our climate becomes increasingly important as we look to the future ahead.

UNDP welcomes young people, teachers, parents, businesses, public sector organizations, NGOs, community groups and all individuals to join the campaign, to learn about climate change and take a stand for the climate with Mission 1.5. There is no better time to go to www.mission1point5.org. 🌍

UNODC and the Government launch the new National Drug Master Plan

As part of the activities to mark this year's World Drug Day, the regional office of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) led by its Regional Representative, Zhuldyz Akisheva, and the national Department of Social Development led by Minister Lindiwe Zulu, launched South Africa's new National Drug Master Plan for the period 2019-2024. The master plan was inaugurated under the theme, "Better Knowledge for Better Care", which highlights the need to have a better understanding of the dynamics and factors related to drug use and to propose solutions that are balanced, health-centred and based on scientific evidence.

In her address outlining the trends in illicit drug trafficking and abuse, Covid-19 implications and priority action in South Africa, Ms. Akisheva said the report warns that the economic downturn caused by the pandemic has the potential to worsen the production, trafficking and use of drugs. The crisis may exacerbate the socio-economic situation of vulnerable groups, who in turn may increasingly resort to illicit activities as a coping mechanism to compensate for the loss of legitimate income and employment. Highlighting the challenges faced by women who use drugs in South Africa, she explained that the 2020 World Drug Report provides an overview of the main reasons behind it.

She said that in order to understand the challenges faced by women who use drugs in South Africa, UNODC and the South African Network of People Who Use Drugs (SANPUD) conducted a needs assessment in four South African cities: Pretoria, Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. The results of the study revealed high levels of trauma and



sexual violence experienced by women coupled with insufficient access to health services, unacceptable violence by law enforcement agencies and abuse of human rights.

Ms. Akisheva told participants who included national authorities, youth ambassadors and youth leaders, civil society organizations and academia that the two core principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are to "ensure that no one is left behind" and to "reach the furthest behind first. People who use drugs are some of the first to be left behind in almost all circumstances," she said.

In her address under the national theme: "Value yourself and make healthy choices against alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse to minimize the spread of COVID-19", Minister Zulu referred to gender-based violence that continues to plague the country. "As we commemorate this day, we recognize the connection between gender-based violence and the unacceptably high levels of alcohol and illicit drugs," she said.

"But this is not a unique South African problem. It is a global problem that

requires global cooperation. It is for this reason that we work jointly with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other development partners to tackle these challenges."

In launching the new National Drug Masterplan (2019-2024), the minister highlighted the several key priority areas that the plan focuses on: demand reduction and related measures, including prevention as well as other health related issues; supply reduction and related measures; effective law enforcement; responses to drug related crime; and countering money laundering and promoting judicial cooperation.

Other priority areas that the plan highlights include ensuring the availability of, and access to controlled substances exclusively for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their diversion; identifying and controlling new psychotropic/psychoactive substances; promoting governance, leadership, and accountability for a coordinated multi-sectoral effective response; and strengthening data collection, monitoring, evaluation, and research evidence to achieve the goals, as well as stimulating

robust and sustainable economic growth aimed at reducing poverty, unemployment and inequalities.

The minister commended the Deputy Minister of Social Development, Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu, whose leadership was instrumental in the development of the master plan and the hard work by the Central Drug Authority (CDA) and relevant stakeholders who developed it.

“The goal of the of the National Drug Master Plan is to contribute to safer and healthier communities through coordinated efforts to prevent use, treat substance use disorders, and reduce production and distribution of illicit drugs in South Africa,” Minister Zulu said.

“The National Drug Master Plan is key to the implementation of the Prevention of and Treatment for Substance Abuse Act,

which mandates the Department of Social Development to develop programmes and support initiatives aimed at the prevention and treatment of substance abuse.”

As part of the government’s effort to prevent drug abuse, the minister referred to the flagship prevention programme started jointly with UNODC called “Ke Moja- I’m Fine without Drugs”. The programme’s aim is to prevent young people from using illicit drugs by enhancing their awareness and understanding of the harmful social and health effects of illicit drug use.

The objective of the programme is to raise the confidence of young people to enable them to resist peer pressure and to prevent underage drinking or experimenting with drugs. The programme is targeted at reducing supply and demand of drug by empowering children, youth, parents and care givers about harmful effects

of substances. The youth are also empowered with life skills to enable them to make informed choices and to resist the pressure of taking drugs.

Ms. Akisheva commended the Department of Social Development for its success in completing the National Drug Master Plan. “During the current time of crisis and uncertainty, it is very important to have a clear vision about the national goals to be achieved. A strong leadership is required to guide the implementation of the plan.” She encouraged the department to strengthen the Central Drug Authority’s mandate.

“As the drug markets are becoming increasingly complex and the COVID-19 pandemic poses new challenges, there may be a need for adjustments in the plan in order to address the emerging needs,” she said, reiterating UNODC’s commitment to assist the Government of South Africa in this process. 🌍

UNDP hands over R1,8 million worth of personal protective equipment



In early July, just over a month since the last handover, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in South Africa donated more personal protective equipment (PPE) to the Gauteng Province’s Department of Health. At the time, Gauteng accounted for a disease burden of 32.2 % of all cases in South Africa and had the second highest number of cases behind the Western Cape Province.

“Clearly, this is an unprecedented pandemic that poses a big challenge to the Gauteng Province; one which the province has met with courage, and the country has

responded to with decisive action and bold leadership,” said Dr. Ayodele Odusola, the UNDP Resident Representative, during his opening remarks at the handover ceremony.

The R1,8 million (US\$112,500) consignment – including 40,000 surgical masks; 4,000 face shields; 20,000 hair nets; 2,000 surgical goggles; 10,000 sterile gloves; 10,000 disposable overalls; 10,000 disposable aprons; 500 forehead thermometers; 10,000 reusable cloth masks and 2,000 hand sanitisers – was received by the Gauteng Member of the Executive Committee (MEC) responsible for health, Dr. Bandile Masuku.

“The Covid-19 pandemic has given us an opportunity to build good strong partnerships and to look beyond the pandemic and towards [the] establishment of universal health coverage as per the global call by civil society,” said Dr. Masuku during his acceptance remarks at the event.

This contribution supplements the efforts by the UN to support Africa to respond and recover from Covid-19. It is also part of a broader partnership that UNDP and the Gauteng Department of Health intend to establish within the framework of the new strategic programme covering the 2020-2025 period. 🌍

#LittleHandsMatter: One hand washes the other

UNICEF's #LittleHandsMatter campaign is fighting the spread of coronavirus in communities across South Africa, one handwashing station at a time.

Only two-thirds of households in South Africa have access to handwashing facilities with soap. In rural areas, and in many of the under-resourced informal settlements in South Africa's metropolises, the lack of access to water and soap poses a serious challenge in curbing the spread of COVID-19. In response, through the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)'s #LittleHandsMatter campaign, the construction of 250 handwashing stations is underway across the country – bringing water to where it is needed most.

The stations, marked with signage to encourage social distancing, are providing much-needed clean water to vulnerable communities in various parts of South Africa. In what has been a rapid emergency response to increase access to hand hygiene, UNICEF, together with South African contractor, Envirosan, have, as of 20 May, installed 19 units with a further 231 set to be built in every province over a few weeks' time.

When UNICEF launched the #LittleHandsMatter campaign in March, it was hard to imagine that it would make such a big impact. The online campaign reached out to thousands of individuals and hundreds of companies with requests for donations towards a simple goal: raising R175,000 (US\$10,800) to build 10 hygiene handwashing stations in under-resourced communities across South Africa.

By the end of the campaign at the beginning of May, through an incredible show of donor support in South Africa and across the globe, it was clear that the initial goals had been far surpassed with more than US\$13,500 raised through individual donations alone. South African health insurance provider, Discovery Vitality matched the US\$3,250 raised by their members and together with the generous donations from Unilever, Puma, Orbia and USAID, at least 250 handwashing stations are now set for construction across all nine provinces of South Africa.



“When the first traces of the coronavirus were recorded in South Africa, a big concern of ours was how to address the threat of infection in densely populated areas and in areas without running water,” said UNICEF South Africa Fundraising Specialist, Fernanda Pereira Bochembuzo. “The outpouring of support from companies and individuals across the country has been humbling and has meant that we’ve had to drastically scale up our response,” she added.

By drawing on UNICEF’s existing work on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), the original plan was to build handwashing stations close to schools, giving children access to clean hand hygiene throughout the country. However, with the national lockdown closing schools, this was no longer an option and the focus shifted to bringing clean water to communities, and closer to children’s homes.

With soap and water being one of the most effective measures against the spread of COVID-19, the generous contributions of South Africans and people around the world are showing that the old ethos – “one hand washes the other” – is about a lot more than just hygiene. 🌍

Nurses and midwives ensure safe pregnancies and births during COVID-19



Healthcare worker engaging patients in the maternity ward.

The onset of the coronavirus has made it evidently clear that nurses and midwives play a central role in the provision of quality maternal and new-born services within the healthcare field. With many national health systems overwhelmed by the COVID-19 pandemic, midwives are demonstrating courage and resilience as they support women and new-borns in the toughest of circumstances.

In Uthukela District in KwaZulu-Natal Province, nurses and midwives continue to be busy even during the national lockdown period, which was intended to restrict movement of people and slow the pace of COVID-19 infections. Uthukela is a priority district for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) with a total estimated population estimated of about 706,500 spread unevenly among 74 wards and health district maternity wards.

Throughout the national lockdown, women have been receiving assistance with child births, illustrating that childbirth doesn't stop because of pandemics, and neither does the work of midwives, as UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem observed in her statement on the 2020 International Day of the Midwife.

Midwives in Uthukela, from Ladysmith Provincial Hospital to Escourt Provincial Hospital, Emmaus Hospital and Injasuthi Clinic, midwives have been working tirelessly round the clock as they believe that they should be available and easily accessible to families in their communities.

"On an average month, Uthukela alone has approximately 900 births per month, which is why we have been preparing our health facilities to deal with an influx of pregnant women during this period," said Thobekile Mpenbe, the District Clinical Specialist at Uthukela district.

Safe pregnancies and childbirth depend on functioning and accessible health systems and strict adherence to infection prevention control measures. During the lockdown, the South African government has undertaken efforts to maintain continuity of service delivery, with reproductive health, including care during pregnancy and childbirth, receiving high priority.

UNFPA-supported health facilities have been prepared and are ready to isolate medium- and high-risk pregnant women. But there is still need for more support as not all facilities in the district have isolation rooms within the maternity departments due to infrastructure constraints.

The staff at primary care level facilities in the district have all been provided basic personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, gloves and sanitizers. Providers and managers at primary health centres in and around Uthukela are supported to maintain routine antenatal and delivery care.

"It is still unknown if COVID-19 affects pregnant women more severely. But particularly during this period, we screen pregnant women who might have respiratory symptoms on entry and refer them to appropriate places," said Ms. Mpenbe.

Having sufficient numbers of well-trained and competent nurses and midwives is considered a key driving force in providing effective and efficient maternal and neonatal services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, capacity constraints have often resulted in the deployment of nurses untrained in midwifery to care for the women, and the assignment of trained nurses to other areas including coronavirus care.

"One of the biggest challenges is that there aren't enough midwives to care for pregnant women in isolated areas, and there is a need for more midwives in these areas. I think it's important therefore that as frontline workers we are adequately capacitated and well-resourced to care for the women where and when they need us the most. It is also critical that we go out there into our communities and do preventative work and help reduce the spread of this pandemic," Ms. Mpenbe said.

UNFPA is supporting widespread advocacy to ensure the safety of midwives and the women they serve, including advocating for higher investments in midwifery around the creation of an enabling environment for nurses and midwives particularly. There is a need to strengthen midwifery services as an integral component of a strategy for effective and sustainable mortality reduction, for both mothers and new-born infants. 🌍

Midwives are the backbone of maternal health systems



UNFPA male midwife

Traditionally, midwives have played a vital role in responding to pandemics. With national health systems in many countries totally overwhelmed, midwives are demonstrating their courage and resilience by continuing to support childbearing women in the toughest of circumstances. Addressing the webinar, Dr. Tlaleng Mofokeng, a Commissioner at the Gender Equality, acknowledged midwives as the backbone of healthy families, communities and health systems.

Elgonda Bekker, the President of the Society of Midwives of South Africa, talked about some of the issues that are still facing midwives, suggesting that one of the biggest challenges is that their work is still not an autonomous practice as they are still connected to nursing. Ms. Bekker lamented the fact that certain competencies required by midwives are sometimes ignored by individual managers.

Dr. Muna Abdullah from UNFPA said that during times of crisis, maternal services often bear the brunt of inattention. However, she emphasized that the priority of UNFPA's work is to ensure women still have access to these services during critical periods. She hailed the work of midwives and pledged to work with, and protect them during the COVID-19 pandemic. She also highlighted the global leadership role of UNFPA as the lead UN agency on midwifery.

All the discussants expressed concern that during such a pandemic, sexual and reproductive health rights get lost among the needs of other health rights. The major issue in responding to COVID-19 is that health resources get diverted to fighting the pandemic, meaning less resources will be allocated to midwifery services and access to safe antenatal care.

Dr. Mofokeng noted that the issues and challenges facing midwifery and access to sexual and reproductive rights existed before COVID-19. She pointed out that the government's efficient responsiveness to the pandemic means they also have the ability to provide these other services.

Dr. Melinda Suchard from the National Institute for Communicable Diseases told participants that the virus was not going anywhere and poses an occupational risk for midwives. She said even as South Africa works to flatten the curve, it also needs to equip people with the knowledge to deal with the pandemic – having insecure midwives who do not have any knowledge will not be of help to anyone.

To mark this year's International Day of the Midwife (5 May), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) teamed up with the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper and the Commission for Gender Equality in organizing a webinar to explore the work of midwives during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, under the theme *Midwives – Celebrate, Demonstrate, Mobilize, Unite*.

As the world grapples with the grave challenges of the coronavirus pandemic, women continue to give birth to babies. As the primary caregivers often risking their lives, midwives are working tirelessly under difficult circumstances in communities, health centres, hospital wards and women's homes to deliver frontline health services.



UNFPA hands over menstrual hygiene products

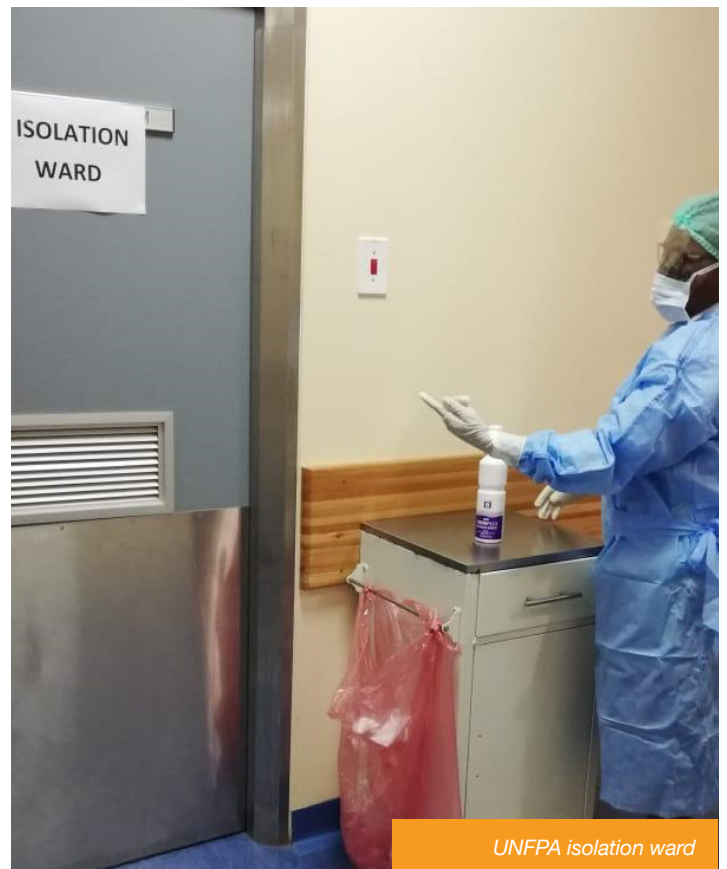
Even in times of relative normality, young people’s voices are often ignored or silenced. During this pandemic, there is an even greater need to ensure that young people are listened to when it comes to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Dr. Abdullah said in her work with the UNFPA, she has found that young people are vocal that the policies put in place by older people are not helpful. Webinar participants emphasized the need to ensure the voices of young people are heard.

Dr. Mofokeng summed up the discussions by noting that midwives are the cornerstone of strong and resilient health systems. The webinar provided a number of great insights into the world of midwifery and why more investments in quality midwifery care and support are critical during this time of COVID-19. 🌍

Ms. Bekker said the Nursing Council of South Africa is in charge of the regulation of midwives, but since the lockdown the council has been closed, which means that many final year midwifery students are in limbo. “If midwifery students do not complete their course and graduate, this may well mean a shortage in the midwifery sector in 2020. This could have very serious consequences for ensuring that there is adequate access to sexual and reproductive rights from all South African women.”

Webinar speakers also expressed concern that in many countries hit hard by COVID-19, midwives are dying due to a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and an overall lack of support. Midwives in many health facilities are being redeployed to respond to the virus, and this risks leaving pregnant and postnatal women without life-saving, time-critical services. The delegates agreed that maternal and newborn health must be prioritized as part of the overall health sector response to the pandemic.

In closing remarks, Dr. Suchard said that midwives need access to information and to become more knowledgeable, which would help to ensure that they deliver the best medical care. Dr. Abdullah urged midwives to have sufficient supplies for the next few months. Ms. Bekker called for the strengthening of the agency for midwives and mothers, including recognition of the profession and its practitioners as autonomous from nursing.



UNFPA isolation ward

Cleantech innovators take on COVID-19

By Leisa Burrell

The global COVID-19 pandemic has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives around the world. As the pandemic unfolds, there is no doubt that more lives will be lost and there will continue to be wider socio-economic impacts for some time to come.

Yet, there are some silver linings: some start-ups and incubators have adopted measures and the unique conditions precipitated by COVID-19 as a springboard to develop innovative, commercially viable, localized solutions, allowing them the opportunity to tap into new opportunities and markets.

SMEs as a lynchpin for COVID-19 recovery

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), small economic units with up to 49 employees account for 70% of global employment, yet, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups are often not given the opportunity to transform their innovations into viable enterprises that attract investments, so as to bring them to scale and have the environmentally and socially transformative impact that the world desperately needs.



This is where the Global Cleantech Innovation Programme (GCIP), implemented by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and funded by the Global Environment Facility, comes in.

“The GCIP supports entrepreneurs developing disruptive early-stage cleantech innovations that address the climate change and energy challenges and helps transform them into fast-growing enterprises,” explains Alois Mhlanga, Chief of UNIDO’s Climate Technology and Innovations Division.

A key component of the GCIP is the annual competition-based Accelerator, which identifies and supports the most promising cleantech innovations towards commercialization. Selected start-ups participate in a rigorous, competitive national acceleration programme that trains, mentors, promotes and connects them to potential investors, customers and partners.

After a four-year donor-funded period, the GCIP in South Africa (GCIP-SA) was fully localized and integrated into the Technology Innovation Agency in January 2018. Like many of their counterparts globally, a number of GCIP-SA alumni enterprises are actively addressing COVID-19 by leveraging constraints into new business opportunities to address the specific needs of the country arising from COVID-19 related measures.

These are a few examples:

Female entrepreneurs joining forces

Euodia Naanyane-Bouwer, overall runner-up and winner of both the best women-led team and social impact innovation awards in the 2017 GCIP-SA, also received a special commendation for social impact at the GCIP Global Forum held in Los Angeles in January 2018. Her company, Gracious Nubian, is a social enterprise based in Bloemfontein in the Free State Province. The company designs, develops and manufactures an innovative washable sanitary pad that can be reused for up to two years.

Naanyane-Bouwer’s product is aimed at addressing both the high cost of sanitary pads – which keeps two-thirds of girls in rural areas out of school during menstruation – and the impact of disposable sanitary pads on landfill sites and water treatment plants. It is currently mainly distributed to girls in poor rural schools in the province through corporate social investment programmes and other forms of support.

Based on its established expertise and track record in the medical materials industry, Gracious Nubian was invited to manufacture medical-grade face masks in partnership with the Central University of Technology, which is sponsoring the medical material, and Med-FM, a medical radio station, which is doing the marketing and distribution of the masks.

Capitalizing on the GCIP alumni network in South Africa, Naanyane-Bouwer will be working with Sandiswa Qayi, the 2016 GCIP-SA youth-led team winner, to provide face shields and face masks to impoverished rural schools in the Free State Province. Qayi's company, AET Africa, manufactures the Hot Spot, a geyser sleeve that can be retrofitted over any standard geyser element to push water from the bottom to the top, providing hot water within 30 minutes, achieving significant energy savings. She repurposed a plant in Dimbaza in the Eastern Cape to manufacture face shields and face masks for COVID-19. Current clients for these products include individuals, corporates and one government department.

Aqueous ozone an unlikely alternative to sanitizers

Andre Nel of Eco-V was one of two GCIP-SA runner-up teams in 2015 for the innovative GreenTower Microgrids, which improve water and energy security through renewable hybrid solar energy, treated borehole water and "internet of things" optimization software. In March 2020, a Royal Academy of Engineering grant was awarded to Eco-V for a GreenTower Microgrid pilot for schools, leveraging the youth.

The project is undertaken in a partnership between Eco-V, the Tshwane University of Technology and Coventry University, and will provide solar-powered and ozone-treated borehole water for sanitation. Aqueous ozone will be used as a sustainable alternative to sanitizers for hand washing and disinfecting classrooms and PPEs in response to COVID-19 and influenza, along with 3D printing and vacuum moulding of personal protective equipment for teachers.

Ozone dissolved in water is a safe and effective disinfectant, sprayed onto surfaces. A >99.99% reduction of MHV-3 (COVID-19 surrogate), Influenza A Virus (H1N1), Measles Virus and Syncytial Respiratory Virus has already been confirmed, with a one-minute dwell time. Testing for COVID-19 was expected to be completed in June 2020.

The concept for a second phase of the GCIP in South Africa has recently been approved by the GEF, as one of ten "projects" globally. Development of a detailed project document is currently under way, with advanced alumni support and further strengthening of the cleantech innovation ecosystem as key focus areas.

This story is based on an article by Leisa Burrell, UNIDO Energy Department, Vienna



The role of the media in countering stigma and misinformation



“The media plays a critical role in the dissemination of information and we need you in this fight against stigma, discrimination and misinformation as we battle COVID-19,” said UN in South Africa Resident Coordinator, Nardos Bekele-Thomas, during her opening remarks at the UN-hosted virtual media roundtable discussion held in August this year.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in South Africa in March 2020, the media have reported on the diverse impact of the pandemic which include heightened food insecurity, poverty and increasing unemployment as well as incidents of gender-based violence. At the same time, the media, through their reports, have revealed how misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 has led to stigma and discrimination within communities. These include the suicide of a young woman in Kwazulu-Natal province following her positive test result for the coronavirus while another woman detailed how she was forced out of her community due to her positive status too.

These and other stories have revealed another side to the battle against COVID-19: the fight against stigma and discrimination, misinformation and disinformation.

In an effort to engage with the media and understand the challenges of the newsroom as well as provide tools to assist in fighting the ugly effects of the scourge, the UN in South Africa hosted a virtual media roundtable discussion with representatives from various media agencies and civil society organizations including the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF), the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF), Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), and the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC).

The virtual media roundtable discussions were divided into two sessions; the first focusing on the role of the media in countering COVID-19

stigma and discrimination while the latter focused on the role of the media in countering misinformation and disinformation from the pandemic.

Panellists during the first session shared the view that survivors of the pandemic need to be celebrated rather than stigmatized and discriminated against as stigma “doesn’t just hurt the feelings of another but kills instead”. In an effort to tackle the issue of stigma and discrimination related to the pandemic, Gushwell Brookes from the SAHRC suggested that the media make more conscious use of analysts and experts so as to ensure that the correct messages are reaching the public and not fuelling the discriminatory sentiments towards certain racial and ethnic communities.

Leonard Zulu, the Representative of the UN Refugee Agency in South Africa, echoed these sentiments, highlighting the need for the media to be more inclusive in the COVID-19 narrative by including the voices of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as they too have been hard hit by the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown. While much coverage centred on the data and technicalities of the pandemic, Mr. Zulu indicated that unfortunately migrant and refugee communities were often blamed for the devastating effects of the lockdown such as job losses and food insecurity which only fuelled xenophobic sentiments that already remain a challenge in South Africa.

The representative from the NCRF, Brenda Leonard, agreed that the role of community media was now more critical than ever. She added that in its efforts to ensure that accurate messages were reaching communities, the NCRF made use of local celebrities and high-profiled community members to spread not only messages of hope and solidarity but also the facts around COVID-19, including symptoms and avenues for assistance.

Phathiswa Magopeni, representing the SABC, described the challenges that newsrooms face as they strive to inform and educate the public about COVID-19. One such example was the rapid change of information on the wearing of face masks. Magopeni indicated that at first it was only healthcare workers and medics that were required to wear face masks, however, that quickly changed to making wearing a face mask mandatory.

As research and information became available, this also led to constant changes in the information that was being disseminated thus creating confusion and also challenging the credibility of the news agencies. Newsrooms were also challenged with making sense of the data that was often very technical while also trying to disseminate information in as many languages as possible to reach as many people as possible.

William Bird of Media Monitoring Africa agreed that misinformation and disinformation was a real challenge as the COVID-19 pandemic evolved. Bird said that their website platform on misinformation had received several complaints.

UNIC Director, Masimba Tafirenyika and Jennifer Thomas from Purpose encouraged newsrooms to sign up to the United Nations Verified and Pause campaigns which aim to encourage behavioural change when sharing information. Mr. Tafirenyika added that “we need to empower people to spread factual and trusted information and that is why we have collaborated on the Verified and Pause campaigns to encourage people to #takecarebeforeyoushare.

The campaigns which can be accessed online to encourage users to sign up as information volunteers and receive information about COVID-19 from trusted sources. The campaigns are also crafted in a creative way to appeal to all generations. 🌍

COVID-19 lockdown-stranded Zimbabweans assisted in returning home

Following the first case of COVID-19 reported in South Africa on 5 March 2020, the government declared a State of National Disaster, followed by a nationwide lockdown announcement on 26 March. Nearly a month and a half into the ongoing lockdown, with COVID-19 reported cases and deaths rising, the Government of South Africa gradually established socio-economic mechanisms to alleviate the brunt of the lockdown modalities on the various vulnerable demographics in the nation.

South Africa is currently home to approximately 4.2 million migrants from the region. Additionally, there are estimated 300,000 refugees in the country. The nationwide lockdown has resulted in huge socio-economic needs in the country, with considerable impact on the vulnerable populations, including migrants. Migrants, who mainly operate in the informal sectors and depend on daily income, are gravely affected by the lockdown and are no longer able to meet their needs such food security, shelter, access to health services and other protection assistance during the COVID-19 crisis.

While some migrant communities have resorted to reaching out to their embassies in South Africa to be facilitated to return to their countries of origin, many have found themselves stranded and in dire need of assistance while remaining in South Africa.

“We were approached by the Embassy of Zimbabwe in South Africa, and a couple of Zimbabwean investors in South Africa, to facilitate fundraising and provision of key services to Zimbabweans currently unable to cope with the socio-economic effects of the ongoing national lockdown,” said Ms. Lily Sanya, the Chief of Mission of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in South Africa.

Through a collaborative approach, IOM, the Embassy of Zimbabwe in South Africa, Neville Holdings Pty Ltd., Albera Logistics, Msport Management and AlbShaun Transport have collaborated in responding to the most urgent needs of vulnerable Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa.

“The Embassy of Zimbabwe appreciates and values the inestimable support and

cooperation of the IOM. It appeals to the Zimbabwean Diaspora community in South Africa and elsewhere and other well-wishers to respond generously to this appeal,” said Ambassador David Hamadziripi, the head of the Embassy of Zimbabwe in South Africa.

The goals of this collective initiative are for the lifesaving needs of the Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa to be met through the provision of protection and health services, including emergency relief items; and to assist up to 4,500 stranded and vulnerable Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa with voluntary return assistance through IOM, including pre-departure assistance in South Africa and post-arrival assistance in Zimbabwe.

A detailed Appeal can be downloaded at this link, and donations can be made through this IOM iDiaspora link.

iDIASPORA is a global engagement and knowledge exchange hub for diaspora communities and those looking to engage with them. 🌍



IOM staff help a Zimbabwean migrant



IOM staff distributes hand sanitizers to assisted voluntary Zimbabwean returnees

Call to creatives inspires “Kindness Contagion”



Inspired by the United Nations global call to creatives, and recognizing the power of art in communicating critical public health messages, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) South Africa launched a similar call specific to COVID-19 messaging in South Africa. In response to the call to translate critical public health messages related to the pandemic, artists have been asked to reflect on the themes of “personal hygiene”, “physical distancing”, “knowing the symptoms”, “myth busting” and the “kindness contagion”.

By the submission closing date, UNDP had received 72 exciting creative submissions from over 50 creatives. The submissions ranged from music videos to poems, song recordings, cakes, comic strips and digital art. One submission in particular – a song submitted by the Human Innovation Project – was inspired by the “kindness contagion” theme and pulled together over 25 artists from across Africa to highlight the message of spreading kindness.



The project partnered with the South African Creative Industries Incubator (SACII) to create the song, “Kindness Contagion”. UNDP later collaborated with the SACII on the release and marketing of the song, profiling the creative community’s Pan-African response to the COVID-19 pandemic as a way of intensifying COVID-19 messaging and encouraging acts of kindness. This partnership also provided an opportunity to showcase other artworks received via the creative call. A selection of the artworks from the UN global call were selected for profiling and are available here - <https://kindnesscontagion.africa/>

Assisting vulnerable communities to sustain gains from the Protected Area Network project



Laurence Mogakane, Minister and Chief Mdluli approaching a household



Counsellor in front of food truck

Rural communities within or adjacent to national parks largely depend on tourism for their survival. With the implementation of the national lockdown due to Covid-19, these communities have suffered a sudden loss in income and, notwithstanding subsequent easing of lockdown restrictions to revive the economy, the livelihoods of these people remain volatile.

In response to this challenge, the South African National Parks (SANParks) mobilized a rapid response to bring relief to neighbouring communities. In April, the Minister of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, Barbara Creecy, led a SANParks initiative to distribute food parcels and water tanks to vulnerable communities bordering the Kruger National Park in both Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces.

This initiative is being extended to communities bordering national parks countrywide. The funding for this project has been sourced from the SANParks Honorary Rangers, SANParks Socio-

Economic Transformation Legacy Fund and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). A total of R6 million (US\$375,000) will be used to purchase food parcels, hygiene products, education materials and water tanks to support 7,500 families nationally.

Over the past six years, the UNDP and SANParks have successfully implemented the Improving Management Effectiveness of the Protected Area Network project. The focus of the project is to expand protected areas by working closely with private and communal landowners, ensuring that they recognize and drive conservation efforts to lower the risk of loss and degradation of critical biodiversity. This project is funded via the UNDP by the Global Environmental Facility Trust Fund and will conclude in 2021.

The work undertaken by the protected area project through various programmes – like facilitating access to markets in the tourism sector and providing support and governance training for land claimants as well as small, medium and

micro-enterprises in the Greater Kruger – is severely impacted by Covid-19. The intervention of SANParks and the UNDP to bring critically needed relief to rural communities mitigates the impact of Covid-19 and affirms the strength of the partnerships that have been built over the past years, despite the worst effects of the pandemic.

Together with SANParks officials and Chief Mdluli, Minister Creecy was met by members of the traditional authorities in Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces who expressed their appreciation of her support in an important moment that recognized the strength of the relationship between the park and communities.

The sustainability of the protected area project relies on partnerships between funders, project leaders, implementing agencies and communities to carefully balance socio-economic considerations to support the local economic recovery with the need to continue implementing activities to improve the management effectiveness of protected areas. 🌍

Countering COVID-19 stigma and misinformation is part of the cure

By Nardos Bekele-Thomas



Nardos Bekele-Thomas

When a 48-year-old South African school teacher in the City of Ekurhuleni tested positive for Covid-19—although she was still asymptomatic—she immediately went into self-quarantine at home where she lived with her husband and two children. That ignited gossip from colleagues and friends.

In the early morning hours on Day 11 in isolation, she set herself on fire in her room after she couldn't bear the stigma and misinformation about the virus from people whom she thought would support and empathize with her. Fortunately, her family managed to rescue her, according to media reports. But the scars from the fire flames from attempted suicide will be with her for the rest of her life. Similar stories—some of them fatal, while still anecdotal—are gradually becoming common.

As Covid-19 spreads and kills people around the world, we find ourselves fighting a war that is even worse than the disease itself: stigma and discrimination fueled by misinformation. As of 12 August, more than 746,000 had died from the

pandemic and about 20.5 million people around the world had contracted it. There are no statistics on people who have suffered from stigma and misinformation. However, according to United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, “as Covid-19 spreads, a tsunami of misinformation, hate, scapegoating and scare-mongering has been unleashed.”

A group of ambassadors from 11 countries—including South Africa—accredited to the UN in New York recently conveyed the same concern, noting: “In times of the Covid-19 health crisis, the spread of the ‘infodemic’ can be as dangerous to human health and security as the pandemic itself.” According to the World Health Organization (WHO), infodemic refers to “an over-abundance of information—some accurate and some not—that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it.”

“Among other negative consequences,” the UN diplomats explained in a statement, “Covid-19 has created conditions that enable the spread of disinformation, fake news and doctored videos to foment violence and divide communities.”

When a nation or a group of people are stigmatized or discriminated against because of a disease, it affects millions of other people around the world. History is replete with this form of discrimination: witness the stigma against people from some African countries because of Ebola, or Asian and Middle Eastern countries owing to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

The Covid-19 infodemic has spread like wild fire on social media since the first outbreak of the pandemic in Wuhan Province in China in December last year. It triggered discrimination against

Chinese citizens. Ironically, even some African nationals resident in China also experienced the same stigma from their hosts. Since then, the world has watched with alarm a proliferation of fake news and misleading videos with harmful effect on many lives.

Lockdowns restrictions have disrupted physical contacts among families, friends and colleagues. In turn, social media has filled the vacuum by accelerating the sharing of information, some in the form of misleading and harmful advice. While some sharing on social media is benign—often among friends, relatives and colleagues, most of it is just forwarding in the hope that the information is true and can help prevent the spread—some is deliberately malicious calculated to create fear and confusion.

The UN is concerned that Covid-19 is breeding a global wave of stigma, discrimination, racism and xenophobia against certain nationals and ethnic groups. Lives are being scarified as people share misleading information. What is needed now, as stressed by the UN diplomats, is for nations to counter stigma and misinformation because their toxic force is heightening “the risk of conflict, violence, human rights violations and mass atrocities.”

What makes Covid-19 stigma harmful is that people who have contracted the virus may be reluctant to disclose their status even to friends, relatives or colleagues. They may also be afraid to seek treatment to avoid gossip and discrimination. For these reasons the UN is calling for solidarity and unity among countries to push back against Covid-19 stigma. This will no doubt require commitment from leaders, influencers and people from all walks of life to speak out with force.

How can ordinary citizens counter misinformation? They should use

information about Covid-19 from reputable news sources, including the WHO, instead of the unverified stories consumed through social media, where popularity is frequently misconstrued as the truth.

To counter stigma, discrimination and misinformation, the UN has set up dedicated websites that provide accurate, science-based and verified information on the pandemic. It has teamed up with partners to launch the “Verified” and “Pause” initiatives around the world.

These campaigns seek to persuade people to “pause and verify” information before sharing emotionally charged content on social media. The UN has developed videos, graphics and multimedia material that urge people to share only trusted and accurate, science-based social media content. As the UN Secretary-General insists, we need to “flood the internet with facts and science while countering the growing scourge of misinformation—a poison that is putting even more lives at risk.”

In South Africa, the government of President Cyril Ramaphosa has sounded the same alarm against stigma. Health Minister Dr. Zwelini Mkhize has declared a war against stigmatizing people who have contracted Covid-19, warning that “if left unchecked, it [stigma] could discourage people from seeking help if they suspect they have contracted the virus.” The government has also developed a dedicated website with a wealth of information including advice on checking symptoms, contact details of health centres and places for additional information, statements by the minister and daily updates of Covid-19 statistics.

The UN has just launched a campaign against Covid-19 with three primary goals: to fight the virus, to tackle its devastating social and economic impact, and to emphasize the need for better recovery under the 2030 Development Agenda.


We will communicate the need for aggressive, early testing and contact tracing, complemented by quarantines, treatment and measures to keep first responders safe, combined with measures to restrict movement and encourage social distancing.

We will emphasize the need to fight the impact of the virus for all humanity, with a focus on the most vulnerable people and economic sectors. We will show that now is the time to redouble our efforts to build more inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient to pandemics, climate change and other global challenges.

Unless global citizens understand that stigma, misleading and inaccurate information on Covid-19 can be as lethal

as the disease itself, more lives will continue to be at risk as the invisible enemy stalks the world. Countering the scourge of misinformation with accurate, science-based evidence and verified information from trusted sources is as equally important as fighting the pandemic. Every one of us has a part to play in this fight to save lives.

Nardos Bekele-Thomas is the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in South Africa. 🌍





STIGMA IS HARMFUL

Respect the rights and dignity of all people

Anyone can contract #coronavirus regardless of nationality, race, colour, gender, age, religion, language, belief, sexual orientation, disability, citizenship or other status.

#SolidarityNotStigma fights the spread of #COVID19

  **COVID-19 RESPONSE**

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Turning COVID-19 into an economic recovery strategy

By Ayodele Odusola



Ayodele Odusola

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally shaken the fabric of our society – forcing humanity to embrace a “new normal” as it relates to ways of living and doing things, always cognisant of the risks the virus poses. Given the degree of openness of the economy, the Government of South Africa proactively instituted total lockdown measures, restricting movement within and outside the country to curb the spread of the disease.

The first of the five-phase lockdown started on 15 March 2020 (level five being the most restrictive), and its successful implementation assisted in slowing down the spread of COVID-19, buying government precious time to strengthen the healthcare system and eventually leading to easing to lower lockdown levels. This whole-of-society approach (involving the governments, private sector and the civil society) in managing COVID-19 provides some resounding lessons for other countries.

Flattening the curve of COVID-19 invariably steepens a technical economic crisis. Under the restrictive lockdown (levels 5 and 4), where only near-essential services were allowed to operate, adverse effects were imposed on the economy from both the demand and supply sides.

These effects range from low productivity and business turnovers to increased unemployment and underemployment, further exacerbating the ailing economy.

Based on the assessment of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) South Africa, the economy was projected to decline by 7.9% through a business-as-usual trend in 2020 and may not recover to its pre-COVID-19 performance until after 2024. Unemployment is expected to add about two percentage points to its 2019 level. Unsurprisingly, single female-headed households and workers with lower education levels (who primarily occupy unskilled jobs) primarily represent the sectors designated as “non-essential”; labour categories such as construction, manufacturing and mining are the most affected, thus likely to fall into deeper poverty or vulnerability.

To ameliorate the impact, the President announced a R500 billion (US\$31.3 billion) stimulus package on 21 April 21 to ease the burden of Covid-19 on micro, small, medium enterprises (MSMEs) including Spaza shops and informal businesses; as well as ease the impact on the lives and livelihood of the working poor and most vulnerable such as women, youth, people living with disabilities, children, and the homeless. The capability of the state to care for its people, leadership in a time of crisis, and to commitment to the well-being and welfare of all who live in this country – values enshrined in the constitution – are all commendable. Yet, the Government must not lose focus in eradicating existing structural impediments like poverty, inequality, and the long-term impacts that COVID-19 will have on the South African economy.

COVID19 offers some lessons. First, it shows the imperatives of providing basic necessities that allow people to observe physical distancing like water, sanitation and decent housing. Second,

it shows the criticality of the skill content of our education to inclusive growth and development. Third, the informal sector plays an essential role in the economy and cannot be ignored. And finally, an industrial policy bias against MSMEs must stop for the country to tame the wicked challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

Turning a public health crisis into an economic strategy is therefore sound economics and a development imperative for South Africa. A healthy economy is driven by a healthy nation and COVID-19 is a threat to both. In this regard, developing capacity of MSMEs to produce personal protective equipment (PPEs) like ventilators, testing kits, protective gears, face masks, gloves, and sanitizers remains critical.

Whilst providing essentials like PPEs to frontline staff and the vulnerable groups, UNDP South Africa is spearheading critical research such as a socio-economic impact assessment and the social and governance impacts of COVID-19 on South Africa, to inform policy response. Growing the local economy is a strategic entry point for economic recovery. As such, UNDP South Africa is supporting small businesses in selected townships to recover from COVID-19, helping informal tailors to produce face masks, holding youth post-COVID19 innovation challenges, and supporting small holder farmers and communities to improve resilience – whilst supporting and strengthening the capacity of national, provincial, and municipal levels of government to design a post COVID-19 recovery planning framework. Moving forward, UNDP’s objective is to support the people and Government of South Africa to turn COVID-19 into an enviable economic strategy.

Ayodele Odusola is the Resident Representative of the UN Development Programme in South Africa. 🌍

Effect of COVID-19 worsening conditions of child labour in agriculture

By Janetta Carlucci



Janetta Carlucci

The number of children between the ages of 5 and 17 working in agriculture has been on the rise globally since 2012. Increasing from 98 million to 108 million children, agriculture accounts for 71% of all child labour. With 20% of all African children in child labour, the continent has the highest prevalence of child labour in the world, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization.

The increase in child labourers has been driven by prolonged conflicts and climate-related natural disasters, followed by forced migration. Efforts to reduce child labour in agriculture have also been hampered by persisting rural poverty and the concentration of child labour in the informal economy and as unpaid family labour, operating as 'hidden workers'.

It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to further worsen the situation, as highlighted during the World Day Against Child Labour commemoration on 12 June.

FAO foresees changes in food consumption patterns – towards staples and away from fruits and other perishables – as well as disruptions in food supply

chains due to lockdowns and movement restrictions. These are likely to significantly affect livelihoods in rural areas where 82% of Africa's poor live, of whom 70% derive their income from farming. Also, the rural poor may be further impacted by the reduction or loss of remittances, an essential source of additional income for many vulnerable households. These families are likely to resort to the use of child labour, among other negative coping strategies, made easier by the closure of schools in response to the spread of COVID-19.

In the immediate term, children may be asked to support their families on and off the farm. They could be exposed to hazardous or exploitative working arrangements, particularly where child labour is used to compensate for acute labour shortages due to movement restrictions. Children engaged in child labour before the crisis are now likely to face worse conditions, shouldering more responsibilities to keep their families food secure.

In the short to medium term, prolonged closure of schools may increase the risk of children dropping out of school and permanently engaging in employment, especially in the likely scenario of drawn-out socio-economic effects of the pandemic. Without furthering their education, children will not gain the skills and capacity needed for decent jobs in future, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and hunger, particularly in rural areas.

Low household incomes and poverty are among the root causes of child labour in agriculture, conditions worsened by the pandemic. It is, therefore, encouraging to see the number of countries considering employment and social protection policies

as critical in their COVID-19 response. However, for these to be effective in mitigating the risk of increasing child labour in the agricultural sector, they need to reach vulnerable households in rural areas.

In addition to the measures considered, governments should install measures ensuring the safe movement of agricultural workers to critical areas during crucial planting and/or harvesting seasons. These adaptive response measures can mitigate the need to use child labour to compensate for labour shortages.

Targeted support to rural areas and ongoing information campaigns on COVID-19 should include dedicated messages on child labour. Awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of preventing child labour and providing examples of age-appropriate and non-hazardous work for children are essential. These campaigns can be run on mass media such as digital platforms, rural community radio stations and through producer organizations and other rural workers' organizations. A key message should be the importance of sending children back to school once restrictions are lifted to prevent an increase in the school dropout rate, especially of young girls.

Zero Hunger in Africa will not be possible without the eradication of child labour. If Africa is to achieve its aspirations under its Agenda 2063, then we need to protect the future generation and help them realize their full potential.

Janetta Carlucci is the Programme Support Consultant on decent rural employment for the regional office of the Food and Agriculture Organization. 🌍

How COVID-19 is affecting the world of work

By Joni Musabayana



Joni Musabayana

The human dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic reach far beyond the critical health response. All aspects of our future are affected – economic, social and political. Our response must be urgent, coordinated, and should immediately deliver help to those most in need.

From workplaces to enterprises, to national and global economies, getting this right is predicated on social dialogue between governments and those on the front line – the employers and workers. ILO estimates are that as many as 25 million people globally could become unemployed, with a loss of workers' income of as much as US\$3.4 trillion. However, it is already becoming clear that these numbers may underestimate the magnitude of the impact.

This pandemic has mercilessly exposed the deep fault lines in our labour markets. Enterprises of all sizes have already stopped operations, cut working hours and laid off staff. Many are teetering on the brink of collapse as shops and restaurants close, flights and hotel

bookings are cancelled, and businesses shift to remote working. Often the first to lose jobs are those whose employment was already precarious – sales clerks, waiters, kitchen staff, baggage handlers and cleaners. The big challenge for most of us is how to protect ourselves and our families from the virus and how to hold on to our jobs. For policy-makers, that translates into beating the pandemic without doing irreversible damage to the economy in the process. The following are the worst affected sectors:

Informal Economy: As a result of the economic crisis created by the pandemic, almost 1.6 billion informal economy workers (representing the most vulnerable in the labour market), out of a worldwide total of 2 billion and a global workforce of 3.3 billion, have suffered massive damage to their capacity to earn a living. This is due to lockdown measures or because they work in the hardest-hit sectors.

More than 2 billion people worldwide work in the informal economy in jobs that are characterized by a lack of basic protection, including social protection coverage. They often have poor access to health-care services and have no income replacement in case of sickness or lockdown. Many of them have no possibility to work remotely from home. Staying home means losing their jobs, and without wages, they cannot eat.

Other Enterprises: Approximately 47 million employers, representing some 54% of all employers worldwide, operate businesses in the hardest-hit sectors: namely manufacturing, accommodation and food services, wholesale and retail trade, and real estate and business activities. However, many of these sectors have reopened.

Youth: Young people constitute major victims of the social and economic

consequences of the pandemic, and there is a risk that they will be scarred throughout their working lives – leading to the emergence of a “lockdown generation”. The pandemic is inflicting a triple shock on young people. Not only is it destroying their employment, but it is also disrupting education and training, and placing major obstacles in the way of those seeking to enter the labour market or to move between jobs.

Policy recommendations:

- Policy interventions targeting young people should be introduced within comprehensive, inclusive and forward-looking employment policy frameworks, including the effective implementation of employment/skills guarantees, linked to broader stimulus and recovery packages.
- Immediate support is needed for enterprises and workers around the world on an unprecedented scale across all pillars of the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s policy framework.
- There is need for urgent policy actions to protect both enterprises, particularly smaller businesses, and workers, especially when operating and working in the informal economy. Guided by the ILO policy framework, effective policy measures should be developed with strong attention to the following issues.
- Support to businesses and jobs need to target the most vulnerable in order to mitigate the economic and social consequences of the confinement period. Given the vulnerability of small enterprises and workers in the informal economy, governments should explore all options to finance measures that support firms and their workers and provide adequate social protection.

- Effective responses require speed and flexibility. Swift policy action, based on country-specific contexts (structure of enterprises' composition, level of informality, etc.) will be essential at each distinct phase of the COVID-19 crisis: containment measures and reduction of economic activity, re-activation once the pandemic is under control, and recovery.
- Governments need to continue to expedite assistance to businesses and workers.
- Policies need to focus on providing income support for both businesses and workers to maintain economic activities, with special attention to enterprises that are at greater risk of business failure and to the self-employed and workers who are more likely to fall into long-term unemployment or underemployment..
- Tailored responses are needed to reach and support small businesses, through combined measures of direct financial support and loan guarantees to avoid saddling firms with too much debt (but conditional on retaining workers).
- Income support for workers and enterprises operating in the informal economy is critical to prevent them from plunging far deeper into poverty.
- As in the reactivation phase, policies should target the provision of timely information about the status of containment measures and exit strategies.
- Longer-term, large public investments are needed to boost employment and crowd in private investment.
- Job-rich recovery will lay the foundation for inclusive and sustainable growth. The impact of the pandemic is likely to be uneven, adding significantly to existing vulnerabilities and inequalities. In the recovery phase, greater attention should be paid to the strengthening of employment policies to support enterprises and workers, along with strong labour market institutions and comprehensive and well-resourced social protection systems, including care policies, shelter and food relief.

With workers returning to work, health controls need to be put in place to ensure the workplace does not become the launch pad for a second wave of the pandemic. The most protective measures should be put in place including engineering controls, administrative controls, safe work practices and personal protective equipment for all workplaces.

But with the war against COVID-19 still to be won, it has become commonplace that what awaits us after victory is a “new normal” in the way society is organized and the way we will work.

Joni Musabayana is the Director of the International Labour Organization's Decent Work Team for Eastern and Southern Africa. 🌍



Human rights now more than ever in response to COVID-19

By Abigail Noko

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health crisis unlike any other — one that is spreading human suffering, exposing the weakness of our social fabric, destabilizing economies and upending the lives of billions of people around the globe. The United Nations is calling for a people-centered response that engages communities affected by COVID-19, respects human rights and inclusion, gender equality and dignity for all.

The message in the UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief on COVID-19 and Human Rights is clear: "People — and their rights — must be front and centre. A human rights lens puts everyone in the picture and ensures that no one is left behind." We have an obligation to ensure that everyone is respected and protected, in the response to this pandemic — it is the most effective way and indeed the only way of ensuring that we enter a post COVID-19 era.

The regional office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for Southern Africa has been working towards ensuring that human rights and gender equality are integral parts of national responses to COVID-19 in southern Africa including in South Africa. The pandemic has brought into stark relief the high levels of inequality, the most pressing human rights concerns, including unequal distribution of resources and access to social and economic rights, and has shone a light on the most marginalized populations that require urgent attention. States have enacted legislative measures in response to COVID-19 that affect the enjoyment of human rights, including civic space, participation and peaceful assembly.

South Africa has sought to adopt an evidence based approach to the pandemic, scaling up the health response, demonstrating leadership and expanding social protection schemes. At the same time, like many countries, it has also been confronted with a number of challenges that have been reported from access to education, water and sanitation, excessive use of force, gender based violence, deepening inequality of marginalized groups amongst other issues.

These actions include:

- (i) protecting people's lives and protecting livelihoods,
- (ii) advocating for inclusive responses to ensure that no one is left behind, (iii) involving everyone in the response through open, transparent and accountable participation,
- (iv) ensuring that emergency and security measures comply with human rights standards, including that they must employ the least restrictive means, be temporal in nature, necessary and proportionate to the public health threat and aimed at protecting people,
- (v) advocating for global solidarity to facilitate global responses, and

- (vi) advocating for the use a human rights approach to build back better.

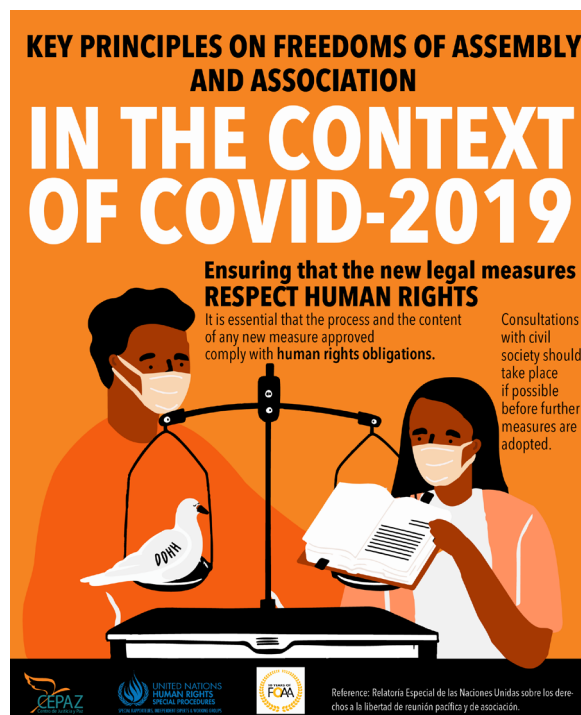
COVID-19 is a virus that does not discriminate, but it affects those that find themselves in situations of vulnerability disproportionately. This pandemic has taught us that we must refocus our actions on ending poverty and inequalities, and on ensuring that we address underlying human rights concerns that leave many vulnerable in the first place as a matter of urgency. Just like a virus that does not discriminate, collectively we are made more vulnerable when human rights are not respected and protected.

Building back better in a post-COVID-19 era will require that human rights are not considered as a distraction or a sideshow, but front and centre in order to build resilient democratic societies that advance the Sustainable Development Goals and build an inclusive and sustainable world for future generations.

Abigail Noko is the Representative of the Regional Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for Southern Africa. 



Abigail Noko




KEY PRINCIPLES ON FREEDOMS OF ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION


IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-2019

Ensuring that the new legal measures RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS

It is essential that the process and the content of any new measure approved comply with human rights obligations.

Consultations with civil society should take place if possible before further measures are adopted.





Reference: Relatoría Especial de las Naciones Unidas sobre los derechos a la libertad de reunión pacífica y de asociación.

Working to leave no child behind

By Jama Gulaid

UNICEF's contribution to the COVID-19 pandemic response is part of a larger plan supported by the United Nations Country Team in South Africa. Developed in early March 2020, the UN Plan is fully aligned with the national COVID-19 response of the South African Government which, in turn, draws from the World Health Organisation's Global Strategic Response Plan.

Under this initiative, UNICEF, in addition to our day-to-day programmatic activities, supports two of eight pillars in curbing the spread of the virus, namely infection prevention control and public education, which includes risk communication.

Under each of our core impact areas – in education, protection and health – we have scaled-up our response, made adjustments and adapted to the changes around us.

In a country with high levels of inequality and poverty, the disproportional impact of the coronavirus on vulnerable communities is a key concern. The most basic defences against COVID-19 – water, soap and space to socially distance – are absent for millions who live shoulder-to-shoulder without proper sanitation in under-resourced areas.

In response to this reality, UNICEF launched an urgent campaign to bring water to where it is most needed. With the goal of building handwashing stations in under-resourced communities, the #LittleHandsMatter campaign was launched in mid-March. Since then, through an outpouring of support from individuals and corporates, the campaign has far surpassed our original target, raising enough funds for the construction of 400 handwashing stations across South Africa. Construction, on the advice of Government, is ongoing with and by early June 2020, nearly 40 stations had been installed across four provinces.

The full impact of UNICEF's work is dependent on the valued, established partnerships with government institutions, non-governmental organizations and communities as well as the corporate sector.

To support the public education and community engagement drive in the country, UNICEF produced new materials and translated them into several South African languages.

Through radio public service announcements, television and print media interviews, social media



Jama Gulaid

channels and the U-Report platform, UNICEF messaging has reached millions of children, youth, parents, care-givers, pregnant women and teachers across South Africa with vital content, responding to their information needs on how to prevent the spread of the coronavirus as well as resources and activities for play-based learning at home.

UNICEF continues to monitor the impact of the epidemic on children's health, safety and education. As we address deep-seated challenges including inter-generational poverty and violence, UNICEF is redoubling its efforts to leave no child behind.

Jama Gulaid, Acting Representative, UNICEF (March 2020 – August 2020)



Our strength lies in our togetherness

By Leonard Zulu



Leonard Zulu

Across South Africa refugees are pitching in to help their communities. UNHCR's Representative in South Africa, Leonard Zulu, on the spirit of ubuntu in South Africa's refugee-hosting communities.

COVID-19 made us all feel vulnerable; it turned all of our lives upside down. The virus threatens everyone, regardless of nationality, but it also reminds us of how interconnected we all are as human beings.

What was most unexpected is the way it brought people together. While forced apart by social distancing measures, we found new ways of working; new ways of supporting those around us: our families, our friends, our communities. The shared uncertainty brought us together.

We all know that COVID-19 doesn't discriminate: we are all at risk of getting sick. But some groups are more vulnerable, especially those living on the margins of society: the poor, the sick, the elderly, persons with disabilities and homeless people. People living in impoverished urban areas are particularly exposed because in their crowded living space social distancing is almost impossible. There are over a quarter of a million people of concern to the UN

Refugee Agency (UNHCR) living in these communities in South Africa.

Through our work in these communities, UNHCR and our partners have come across acts of human solidarity and kindness by many people during the pandemic, including refugees and asylum seekers.

Our strength as a human community lies in our togetherness. South Africa has been a generous host to refugees and asylum seekers for many decades, granting them the right to work and access public services on par with nationals. Amid these dark times, those very same refugees have shown a great appetite to contribute and do something for the communities that welcomed them. Refugees that I have spoken with, told me that in the uncertainty of COVID-19 they also saw an opportunity, an opportunity to show their gratitude and to be part of the solution, to be part of their new communities away from home.

This crisis shows us that everyone has a role to play. Refugees who attended medical and pharmacology courses at South Africa's universities are now on the front lines of the response. UNHCR was able to support them through their studies under our DAFI scholarship scheme, which provides bursaries to highly able refugee students. Now they are a vital part of the health care system, administering to the sick and saving lives.

In eight of the nine provinces, the Somali business community is organizing food parcel distributions for members of their local host communities struggling to make ends meet. Many fled the civil war in Somalia in the 1990s, eventually finding a home here in South Africa. They jumped at the chance to give back, when they saw that the people who had made them welcome were struggling to put food on the table because they could not earn the daily wage on which they depend.



A female refugee employed by UMOJA Skills makes masks to distribute in the Cape Town townships @Liliane Mukidi_UMOJA Skills

At this year's World Refugee Day, held every year in June, our usual commemorations were a muted affair around the world. Our theme this year was "Everyone can make a difference. Every action counts", which I see every day embodied in the refugee doctors, merchants and shopkeepers here in South Africa. Like the Rwandan doctor in KwaZulu Natal, or the Somali spaza shop owner in Limpopo, every one of us can make a difference.

We all have our part to play. As UNHCR, we will continue to support the most vulnerable refugees, asylum seekers and members of the host community. On top of our usual activities like legal assistance and counselling, we are providing one-off cash assistance to people who fall through the social safety net and can't access government-provided grants.

When this emergency finally fades into the past and we can take stock of where we were and where we are now, there is one thing I hope to see remain: this spirit of togetherness. You can count me in.

Leonard Zulu is the Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in South Africa. 🌍

Supporting industry in times of COVID-19

By Khaled El Mekwad

The global Covid-19 outbreak is putting an immense strain on societies and economies around the world. Countries are experiencing a tragic toll in terms of human suffering and casualties, with major disruptions being felt across economic and social sectors in an already fragile world economy.

As part of the United Nations family in South Africa, the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is supporting the government to address the impact of Covid-19 during this time and in preparing its aftermath as the country moves into the recovery phase. UNIDO's initiatives have a strong focus on supporting industrial production and business continuity, especially for women and youth-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This is in line with UNIDO's mandate to promote Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development (ISID) to harness the full potential of industry's contribution to the achievement of sustainable development and lasting prosperity for all. The following are some examples of areas where UNIDO supports the South African government in addressing the impact of Covid-19:

Reducing the dependence on imports

In order to overcome the disruptive effect of Covid-19 on international trade and supply of imported goods, UNIDO is working with the government to identify products and components that can be locally manufactured to reduce dependency on imported ones. This initiative aims to ensure business continuity for SMEs and includes value-chain plotting, the creation of new skills and capacity, the acquisition of assets and identifying value creation opportunities such as re-purposing



Mr. Khaled El Mekwad

and retooling of operations. Particular attention is being paid to youth and women-led enterprises, the creation of green jobs linked to the circular economy, waste beneficiation and cleaner production practices.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution in action

Covid-19 has rendered many elements of the proverbial "business as usual" obsolete and forced us to consider new ways of working. Digital platforms have enabled teams to stay connected while online meetings, training sessions and conferences are now the norm. It has also become possible to fill our fridges, cupboards and medicine cabinets without leaving our homes. Some companies have already changed existing production lines to start producing personal protection equipment (PPE). This is the Fourth Industrial Revolution in action.

At the request of the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, UNIDO will be supporting the government in building capacity for the digital economy, thus assisting the South African industry to improve its competitive position in a post Covid-19 environment.

Healthcare waste management

UNIDO is working alongside UN Environment to focus on waste management, expanding training activities on safety and security for healthcare waste management, among others. The project will also include the purchase of a truck and PPEs to support the work of waste pickers as significant role-players in the recycling systems of the plastic packaging industry in the country. In cooperation with the South Africa Waste Pickers Association and the African Reclaimers Organization, this initiative will contribute to the UN Flash Appeal in South Africa under the Wash, Sanitation, and Hygiene Sector Response Strategy.

Access to leading-edge information

The South African government and industry have access to UNIDO's comprehensive and up-to-date collection of Covid-19-related reports and documents, including research, statistics, case studies, best practices and learnings from across the world. These can be accessed at <https://www.unido.org/unidos-comprehensive-response-covid-19>

UNIDO stands with South Africa in responding to the Covid-19 crisis, building a better future and leaving no-one behind.

Khaled El Mekwad is the Representative and Head of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization for the South Africa Regional Office. 🌍

Tackling the inequality pandemic: A new social contract for a new era

By António Guterres



António Guterres: Secretary-General

Nelson Mandela spent his whole life fighting against inequality and injustice. “As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world,” he said, “none of us can truly rest.” I was honoured to deliver this year’s Nelson Mandela lecture on the occasion of Madiba’s birthday, 18 July, and I chose rising and unsustainable inequality as my theme.

From the exercise of global power to racism, gender discrimination and income disparities, inequality threatens our wellbeing and our future. We desperately need new thinking to halt and reverse it. We often hear that a rising tide of economic growth lifts all boats. But in reality, a rising tide of inequality sinks all boats. High levels of inequality have helped to create the global fragility that is being exposed and exploited by COVID-19.

The virus is shining a spotlight on inequalities of all kinds. It poses the highest risk to the health of the most vulnerable, and its social and economic impact is concentrated on those who are least able to cope. Unless we act now, 100 million more people could be pushed into extreme poverty and we could see famines of historic proportions.

Even before COVID-19, people everywhere were raising their voices against inequality. Between 1980 and 2016, the world’s richest 1 per cent captured 27 per cent of the total cumulative growth in income. But income is not the only measure of inequality. People’s chances in life depend on their gender, family and ethnic background, race, whether or not they have a disability, and other factors. Multiple inequalities intersect and reinforce each other across the generations, defining the lives and expectations of millions of people before they are even born.

Just one example: more than 50 per cent of 20-year-olds in countries with very high human development are in higher education. In low human development countries, that figure is 3 per cent. Even more shocking, some 17 per cent of the children born twenty years ago in those countries have already died.

The anger fueling recent social movements, from the anti-racism campaign that has spread around the world in the aftermath of George Floyd’s killing to the chorus of brave women calling out the powerful men who have abused them, is yet another sign of utter disillusionment with the status quo. And the two seismic shifts of our age – the digital revolution and the climate crisis – threaten to entrench inequality and injustice even more deeply.

COVID-19 is a human tragedy. But it has also created a generational opportunity to build a more equal and sustainable world, based on two central ideas: a New Social Contract, and a New Global Deal. A New Social Contract will join Governments, their people, civil society, business and others in common cause.

Education and digital technology must be two great enablers and equalizers, by providing lifelong opportunities to learn

how to learn, to adapt and take on new skills for the knowledge economy. We need fair taxation on income and wealth, and a new generation of social protection policies, with safety nets including Universal Health Coverage and the possibility of a Universal Basic Income extended to everyone.

To make the New Social Contract possible, we need a New Global Deal to ensure that power, wealth and opportunities are shared more broadly and fairly at the international level.

A New Global Deal must be based on a fair globalization, on the rights and dignity of every human being, on living in balance with nature, on respect for the rights of future generations, and on success measured in human rather than economic terms.

We need global governance that is based on full, inclusive and equal participation in global institutions. Developing countries must have a stronger voice, from the United Nations Security Council to the Boards of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and beyond. We need a more inclusive and balanced multilateral trading system that enables developing countries to move up global value chains.

Reform of the debt architecture and access to affordable credit must create fiscal space to generate investment in the green, equitable economy.

The New Global Deal and the New Social Contract will put the world back on track to realise the promise of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals – our globally-agreed vision of peace and prosperity on a healthy planet by 2030.

Our world is at breaking point. But by tackling inequality, based on a New Social Contract and a New Global Deal, we can find our way to better days ahead. 🌍

Profile: Christine Muhigana



Christine Muhigana, UNICEF South Africa Representative

Christine Muhigana is the new Representative of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) in South Africa. She took up her duties beginning September 2020.

Prior to her appointment to this position, Ms. Muhigana, a Rwandan national, was the UNICEF Representative in the Central African Republic (CAR) for three years, from April 2017 to July 2020. During her tenure, she led the UNICEF team in increasing immunization coverage, school enrolment, protection of children and treatment of severe malnutrition, through building systems and responding to humanitarian shocks.

Between October 2013 and April 2017, Ms. Muhigana was UNICEF Deputy Regional Director for the West and Central Africa region based in Dakar, Senegal. In this capacity, she provided leadership and strategic guidance to the country offices in the region in the development and implementation of UNICEF country programmes.

Between May 2008 and October 2013, she served as Deputy Secretary of the UNICEF Executive Board, based in New York, USA, where she provided coordination and guidance to the board,

ensuring decisions were strategic and contributed to advancing the overall child rights agenda.

During this period, from July to August 2013, she served as Acting UNICEF Representative in Cameroon, where she played a leading role in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the country programme, including in the response to the food crisis in the North and Far North regions.

From February 2007 to May 2008, she was a Strategic Planning Specialist in the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, based in New York. In this role, she served as the Permanent Coordinator for Burundi, which included assisting the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission in developing and implementing an integrated peacebuilding strategy.

Ms. Muhigana started her career with the UN in 1988 and has more than 30 years of experience in the United Nations. She has worked in positions of progressively higher responsibilities in the areas of strategic planning, partnership building and gender equality in Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Cape Verde and at UNICEF Headquarters.

For several years, she was a senior facilitator and resource person for the development of UN Development Assistance Frameworks and led such exercises in Afghanistan, Cape Verde, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and Uganda.

Ms. Muhigana holds a master's degree in Political Science and International Relations as well as a master's degree in Maritime and Air Law from the Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium. 🌍



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#SolidarityNotStigma fights the spread of #COVID19

SOUTH AFRICA



Relevance of human rights recommendations in responding to the pandemic

OHCHR aims to put human rights at the heart of the response of States, UN partners, civil society and the private sector to COVID-19. It focuses on supporting six priority areas: 1. Respect for all human rights and addressing specific issues which might be less visible or more sensitive; 2. Vulnerable people and groups; 3. Participation, inclusion and access to information; 4. Economic and social rights; 5. Integrating human rights into the UN system response; and 6. UN Human Rights Mechanisms contribution to COVID-19 response.

The graph shows recommendations addressed to South Africa by the UN Human Rights Mechanisms: the Universal Periodic Review, the Special Procedures mandate holders and the Treaty Bodies in the 5 years prior to the pandemic, which OHCHR assesses as particularly relevant in responding to the pandemic in an inclusive and sustainable way. All recommendations addressed to South Africa can be found at the Universal Human Rights Index at <https://uhri.ohchr.org/>.



Future opportunities to assess the status of implementation of these and other recommendations are during the upcoming review by the Universal Periodic Review in 2022, relevant Treaty Bodies as well as during upcoming visits by Special Procedures mandate holders in the country.