

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

June & July Status Report

## HIGHLIGHTS



Distributed an additional 450 relief packages to our girls, youth, and vulnerable community members.



Produced 1,000 face masks for our program participants.



Supported 38 emergency cases of violence, referred to us through the local police, our phone call system, partners and/or staff.



Reached 12,000+ people with COVID-19 related posts on social media.

## SITUATION OVERVIEW

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have continued to be felt in Uganda throughout the months of June and July. As of 30 July, there have been 1,140 confirmed cases in Uganda, with 2 deaths and over 1,000 recoveries. The worst affected areas continue to be border regions, where bad outbreaks in neighboring countries are entering into Uganda mostly through transmission from long-distance truck drivers. Kampala district and the surrounding areas have been moderately affected. While neighboring countries, such as Kenya and Tanzania have begun to open up schools and public spaces, there is still a hesitation from the Ugandan government to loosen restrictions. Therefore, at the time of writing schools remain closed, and there is still a curfew in place.

This has continued to affect youth and adolescents, who have been largely confined to their homes since April. Many of these children do not have access to the Internet at home and are unable to access learning materials offered via TV and radio. In addition, families as a whole continue to suffer economically, especially those living in urban areas where residents are renters, do not grow their own food, and are overwhelmingly

likely to be employed in the informal sector and unable to return to work. Most recently, the government has warned of impending severe food shortages, due to the impact of COVID-19 and bad weather in the past months. In May, the World Food Programme warned that at least 20 million people across nine countries in the region, including Uganda, were at risk of severe food insecurity due to pressures on their livelihoods arising from COVID-19.

The communities that we work with are now facing an extremely difficult set of challenges as a result of the pandemic, which has disproportionately affected women and children. As well as economic, social, and educational challenges, we are also acutely aware that reports of sexual abuse and violence continue to rise during this time, when families are confined to their homes. The Ugandan Minister of Gender, Labor and Social Development recently noted this increase, while issuing a warning about the far-reaching effects of gender-based violence (GBV).

It is not yet known when schools and all workplaces will re-open in Uganda. As an organization, we are now prepared for dealing with the effects of COVID-19 and the lockdown, which will be felt for a long time throughout Uganda and within the families that we serve.

## OUR RESPONSE

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many other issues within Ugandan society, with the most prevalent being increasing cases of gender-based violence (GBV) and abuse or neglect of children at home. We are also starting to see an increase in teenage pregnancies that need immediate health and medical support. When conducting our phone outreaches and distributing relief packages to families, our staff were informed of many emergency cases requiring immediate attention from GUIU within our communities. Many of the cases that have been flagged to our staff since the beginning of the lockdown period require food and/or medical assistance, as those who were living in poverty before the lockdown are seeing their situations deteriorate further.

**Did you know that 1 in 3 women have experienced violence in her lifetime? This number is expected to increase during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown.**

## EMERGENCY FUND

In order to tackle this deepening issue, GUIU has expanded our Emergency Fund, by taking on and supporting more cases thanks to increased funding; monitoring cases in a more systematic way – through the creation and use of a new case tracking system; and going beyond cases of GBV to also assist girls and young women with the effects of and needs arising due to unintended pregnancies.

Thus far, the fund has been used to support women and girls on a case-by-case basis, with assistance that is tailored to their needs, through coordination with our staff, local police, and other relevant local authorities and services. As part of this work, in June and July, GUIU's Emergency Fund has supported 38 girls and young women survivors of violence with medical, legal, or food assistance.

In addition, we have compiled and analyzed the data from the psycho-social calls that we have made since April 2020, as part of our outreach. We are using this data to monitor trends in abuse or other concerns, track the most needed assistance, and plan our response in a targeted and tailored way. For instance, the calls enlightened us to the fact that many parents are planning to take their children back to the villages in case schools do not reopen.

**“The situation has been quite challenging, but I am so grateful for the GUIU relief package; it came in at the right time. Now, I am planning to take my girls back to the village in case school does not resume.”**

*Judith, AGP parent*



*(GUIU Coaches making psycho-social calls from our office space)*

## COVID-19 TASK FORCE

In June, GUIU set up a COVID-19 Task Force with our Ugandan and US board for strategic decision-making and scenario planning during this time. The Task Force was set-up to include both senior management and members of both boards. We believe that during these challenging times, it is essential to use all the resources and knowledge that our board members have, and to ensure that our decision-making processes are engaging all parts of the organization.

## FAMILY RELIEF PACKAGE DISTRIBUTION



*(Mother and daughter receiving a family relief package)*

During this period, we continued to distribute relief packages for families of the girls in our programs, patron teachers, Ni-Yetu community structures, and other community members at-risk of hunger. The relief packages included posho, beans, salt, soap, and sanitary pads. The distribution days were also used to check-up on the girls' wellbeing and to provide counselling to girls and their guardians around prevention of GBV and how to report cases, as well as around proper methods for prevention of COVID-19. The team also distributed an information sheet with each package featuring information on the prevention of GBV and COVID-19.

In June and July, we distributed a further 450 packages, reaching our target of reaching a total of 2,000 families.

## MAZURI-MADE FACEMASKS

Our Mazuri Designs Hub staff have produced colorful, washable facemasks for our staff, Coaches, and program participants. The young women trainees in the Mazuri Designs course also received a mask, which are mandatory to wear during training sessions, as well as learned how to make them on our sewing machines.

So far, the team has produced 1,000 facemasks, and are currently working to make a further 1,000 for the Bringing Voices Together project. We have also been selling masks alongside our other Mazuri Designs Hub products.



*(Mazuri Designs trainees wearing masks they learned to make)*

## COMMUNITY HEALTH DRIVE & HEALTH CAMP

GUIU has been reaching out to our communities in innovative ways to spread messaging around COVID-19 and the prevention of GBV. On 25 June, our program team held a community health drive in Nakawa division with support from our partners, Action 4 Health Uganda, Naguru Teenage Information and Health Centre, and Kampala City Council Authority. Our team drove through communities in a special, colorful health van, spreading health messages via loudspeaker and distributing critical information materials on sexual and reproductive health (SRH), GBV prevention, and COVID-19.



*(GUIU van and Youth Truck preparing to head off into the communities)*





*(Coach Hajara handing out health information to community members)*



*(Coach Clare talking to young boys about sexual and reproductive health)*

Our team also held a three-day Health Camp from 22 – 24 June in Namuwongo, reaching a total of 248 people with family planning services, HIV testing and counseling, STI treatment, and more. This included 67 girls and women, who we specifically reached out with sexual and reproductive health (SRH) advice and assistance. Unfortunately, we have noticed an increase in women’s fear of accessing SRH services during this time due to many women being forced to stay at home and existing gender norms being further entrenched.

## **COMING SOON: BRINGING VOICES TOGETHER PROJECT**

Our team collectively designed a new project, the Bringing Voices Together (BVT) Project, to respond to the specific issues and needs that adolescents and youth are facing as a result of COVID-19 and lockdown measures.

Between March 30 and April 28 2020, a total of 3,280 cases of GBV were reported to police, according to the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development. There have been increased reports of girls being approached regarding sexual exploitation, and being harassed or abused by family members at home (New Vision, 2020). Furthermore, it is still unknown when schools will reopen, if at all, in the year, leaving many girls without access to education. The government has started classes via radio and TV, however, many adolescents don’t have access to these, or their parents don’t prioritize their learning at home.

In response to these issues, GUIU has determined to support communities, especially adolescents and youth, to amplify their voices on these issues and come together to discuss different, urgent matters. In our recent phone consultations with communities, many members mentioned that they want and need to talk as a community about issues such as increased unintended pregnancies, abuse of power, ending the culture of silence around GBV, and sexual exploitation, amongst others.

Bringing Voices Together will be uniquely implemented through small dialogue circles on key concerns for adolescent girls and boys, ages 9 to 15 years; and community campaigns through online platforms, working with partners, hosting radio talk shows, and community health drives.

We are currently in the community mapping phase of the project and will launch the project in early August 2020, so watch this space for more information and to see our first activities!

**"Women-led organizations have transformed themselves almost overnight into humanitarian organizations, distributing desperately needed food and hygiene products along with essential public health information."**

*Susan Blaustein, ED and Founder of our partner, WomenStrong International*

## MEDIA & OUTREACH

In June and July, we have continued our youth-friendly social media outreach to communicate with our supporters, program participants, and the wider public to spread vital messages at this time. We reached 12,311 people with our COVID-19 related posts in these months, which had over 1,700 engagements in the form of likes, re-tweets, etc. We also launched our new Vlog series as an interactive way to spread information and inspiration online.

Our Executive Director, Monica Nyiraguhabwa, joined Michelle Obama for a [virtual webinar](#) organized by our partner, Girls Opportunity Alliance. She had the chance to be inspired by Michelle and others while also sharing about GUIU's work to support girls during the COVID-19 pandemic.



We have launched weekly radio talk shows! Every Thursday, our team and girls are hostin conversations on Family Radio 105.3FM throughout Uganda, discussing different topics such as life skills, GBV and COVID-19 prevention, menstrual hygiene, and more.

*(Spreading messages to prevent violence through family radio shows)*



Ugandan famous TV personality, MC Ibrah, also featured our work in the Ni-Yeti Youth Program, including interviews with our Executive Director, Monica Nyiraguhabwa, and our Coach, Clare Akumu, for a [segment on GBV in Uganda](#). The story features community voices on GBV and shows what GUIU is doing to prevent future cases by supporting and encouraging youth.





*(Spreading messages to prevent violence through family radio shows)*

At the beginning of June, our Ni-Yetu Youth Program participants were featured on community radio talks in two different areas in Kampala district, in collaboration with health workers from Kawala Health Center. They discussed GBV and SRH management during the lockdown. There was an emphasis on the importance of dialogue between couples rather than resorting to violence.

We also published our first [Vlog discussion](#) in late-June, featuring male and female change agents and Reverend Nathan Mugalu, clergy with the Church of Uganda, discussing how they support youth with information on SRH. It was particularly important to feature the voices of these community and religious leaders at a time when many of our adolescents and youth are looking for guidance and advice from their elders, and the need for open and honest communication across generations is more important than ever.

**"If we keep quiet, yet the youth are in a stage of making key decisions about their future, we shall be neglecting our role as religious leaders of influencing society."**

*Reverend Nathan Mugalu*

In July, our team produced [another Vlog featuring youth leaders](#), Ni-Yetu peer educators and Champions of Change to share their views around the challenges that girls and young women are facing due to COVID-19 in Uganda and the subsequent lockdown.

GUIU was [featured in Ms. Magazine](#) alongside our partner, WomenStrong International, to talk about how women leaders are giving us hope, even in these challenging times.

Finally, you can read [our latest Girls' Globe article on our Community Health Drive](#) and [blog post on Women's Leadership during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

**"Women's leadership is more important than ever to respond to the specific gender consequences of the pandemic."**

*Kimberly Wolf, Deputy Executive Director*