



# COVID-19 RESPONSE

August & September Status Report

## Highlights

Reached 1,280 adolescents and youth through Bringing Voices Together sessions

Provided 450 people with health information and services

Processed 70 emergency cases

3,255 people were reached with COVID-19 related posts on social media

Global recognition in CNN op-ed written by Michelle Obama and Melinda Gates

## Situation Overview

The cases of COVID-19 continued to rise throughout August and September, with the total number standing at around 9,000 at the time of writing. In addition, there have been 82 deaths. Most of these cases were registered in urban centers, in particular Kampala, where the high population density contributed to a faster spread of the virus.

Despite the rising numbers, much of life in Uganda is returning to 'normal'. By the end of September, public transport had resumed with social distancing measures, places of worship were open, and the airport started operations. It was also announced that candidate classes at schools would be allowed to re-open in mid-October, to receive students who are in P7, S4 and S6, and University, so that they may prepare for final exams. However, schools remained closed to all other students, and the education of over 10 million children is still disrupted. In addition, the country remains under curfew from 9pm to 6am.

Children in the poorest and most vulnerable households and communities are still being disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and the subsequent restrictions in Uganda. Many have been unable to access any form of schooling since April, due to a lack of internet or electricity at home and families not being able to pay for tutoring or scholastic materials. In addition, child labor has been on the rise, with 56% of Ugandans noticing an increase in child labor since the lockdown began (Save the Children, 2020). Similarly, rates of child marriage and early pregnancy are also reportedly rising during the pandemic. The New Vision national newspaper in Uganda reported that in one district alone, the rates of early pregnancy are between 25-30% and child marriage is at 17%. This is also expected to contribute to many children, especially girls, not returning to school when they reopen.

## Our Response

In order to continue reaching our communities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our team has been working tirelessly in increasingly innovative ways to ensure that no one is left behind. Although our core in-school programs are still on hold and are awaiting the reopening of schools, we have begun to reach adolescents and youth in their communities. This contact within communities acts as a lifeline for many young people and adolescents who are out of school, often forced to work or take on extra household burdens at home, and sometimes at greater risk of physical or sexual abuse.

While we cannot predict how the remainder of 2020 will be for our communities, nor in Uganda more generally, we do know that GUIU's dedicated team will continue to serve our girls, women, and youth in these uncertain times.

## Bringing Voices Together

Our new project, Bringing Voices Together (BVT) has reached a total of 1,280 adolescents in the last two months throughout Kampala. The aim of the project is to respond to the specific issues and needs that adolescents are facing as a result of COVID-19 and lockdown measures while providing them with psycho-social support and mentorship. Bringing Voices Together is uniquely implemented through community-based, small dialogue circles covering key concerns for adolescent girls and boys, ages 9 to 15 years. This project has ensured that we continue to reach adolescents in our communities, with much-needed learning interventions to promote well-being and cohesion in a safe way, following the Ministry of Health guidelines.

Thus far, our Coaches have held sessions on topics such as: communication and human rights, gender-based violence, and puberty and menstruation. Each session is facilitated by one or two of our amazing Coaches, who bring together single sex groups of around 10-15 adolescents. All participants are given a Mazuri Designs facemask and are seated in accordance with social-distancing guidelines.

The turnout of sessions has been better than anticipated, demonstrating the need and desire for educational-style sessions with youth in their communities, who are currently unable to attend school.

Our Coaches have been using the sessions to inform the adolescents about the importance of reporting violence and sexual abuse to local leaders and the police. This is especially important during this period, when rates of physical and sexual abuse have risen, and adolescents remain at home with perpetrators without the ability to confide in teachers or friends at school.



The sessions have also stressed the importance of critical decision-making and resisting negative peer pressure. This is especially necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic, as many adolescents come to terms with following new rules and regulations that may seem unfair or unnecessary. We also ensured that the sessions included fun and interactive activities to boost the energies and self-confidence of adolescents at this trying time. We believe that through knowledge and activities that boost self-confidence and esteem, we can encourage adolescents to be change-makers in their own communities.

**“I am always going to avoid bad friends because they don’t build me.”**

Ayirwoth Proscovia, 13 years old

**“I have learnt to be assertive and not to allow violence to happen in my community and to be violated.”**

Apolot Angella, 12 years old

**“I have learned that I have to respect myself”**

Mutoni Kelsey, 12 years old



## Mazuri-Made Facemasks

In the months of August and September, our Mazuri Design team made an additional 300 facemasks for distribution within our programs and for private orders. The beautiful and practical masks help our staff and program participants to stay safe when attending GUIU sessions and in their daily lives. By giving masks to our program participants, we alleviate the cost of having to buy their own mask to wear in public, which is mandatory in Uganda.

## Community Health Drive and Camps

On September 1st, our team held a Community Health Drive in the area of Kitintale, which reached an estimated 450 people. During the Community Health Drive, our staff disseminated information about public health and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), through the use of a loudspeaker that played through from GUIU van. They also stopped in public areas to speak to community members and provide them with more tailored information. Our Coaches handed out informational pamphlets and flyers to community members regarding SRHR services, menstruation, proper hygiene, and gender-based violence prevention.

The main focus of this Community Drive was to give information on SRHR, and drug and alcohol abuse, which are on the rise during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to create safer home and community environments for women and children, it is vital to address the challenges that men face, which may lead to aggression and violence. Uganda is the highest consumer of alcohol per capita in East Africa (WHO, 2014). Drug and alcohol abuse affects many young people in Uganda, with a 2017 study finding that 70% of surveyed students ages 12 to 24 years had used alcohol or drugs, and 39% stating that they regularly abused substances (Abbo et.al., 2017).



During this Community Health Drive, our in-house Nurse was on hand to give information to the many people who asked questions about excessive drinking, the dangers of alcohol abuse, and how to cut down on consumption. The initiative was well received, with community members approaching or calling GUIU to thank us for the support!

## Emergency Cases

Throughout August and September, the GUIU team handled a total of 70 emergency cases, which were referred to our team through community members, program participants, and the Child and Family Protection Units in the police. Our emergency case register is now fully operational and is being used by staff to track cases that are referred to us, and monitor their progress and follow-up from GUIU.

Many of the women and girls who receive emergency support are survivors of abuse and neglect, therefore, our team works to find sustainable solutions for them, on a case-by-case basis in partnership with relevant local authorities and services. In the past two months, we have supported women and girls with a range of assistance that was tailored to their needs, including financial support, psychosocial help, medical assistance, and food relief.

In addition, we have continued to strengthen our interventions with the Child and Family Protection Units in the local police departments that we work with. In the past two months, we conducted a feedback meeting with the police units, during which we also reviewed GUIU's response work and discussed areas that need more support.

## Media and Outreach

During August and September, our COVID-19 media and outreach campaign focused on reinforcing the knowledge and skills sharing surrounding our new Bringing Voices Together Project. Throughout this time, we have continued to share vital information with, and engage with our program participants, stakeholders, and key community support structures. During these two months, we reached over 3,255 people with over 450 engagements in the forms of likes, shares, reads, conversations, and more.

Program Officer, Joan Atimango, wrote a [blog post](#) about our new Bringing Voices Together Project and the importance of creating safe spaces for young people during COVID-19. This blog post talks about the success of BVT thus far, and also contains a video overview of the project and its positive impact on adolescents.

### Michelle Obama and Melinda Gates: We can't ignore adolescent girls in Covid-19 response

Opinion by Michelle Obama and Melinda Gates  
Updated 3:00 GMT (2200 HKT) August 7, 2020



Fortunate Ayomirwoth, a 15-year-old girl in Kampala, Uganda, who says "I miss school"

Editor's Note: Michelle Obama is the former first lady of the United States and founder of the Girls Opportunity Alliance. Melinda Gates is co-chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and author of "The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World." The views expressed here are those of the authors. Read more opinion on CNN.

In acknowledgement of our COVID-19 Response, we were featured in a [CNN op-ed](#) written by Michelle Obama and Melinda Gates that highlighted the story of our Big Sister, Fortunate Ayomirwoth and our COVID-19 response work. Obama, founder of the Girls Opportunity Alliance, and Gates addressed the unique issues being faced by young women and girls during and after this pandemic. In response to this [op-ed](#), we also published a [blog post](#) with the full story of Fortunate Ayomirwoth, providing a glance into her day-to-day life during COVID-19 times.

We were also featured in an article published in Ms. Magazine, highlighting the challenges girls face with school closures. Together with our partners at WomenStrong International, our Program Officer, Abel Moses Mwesigwa, discussed the negative impact of the migration of girls from the city to rural areas.

**"In Kampala, Uganda, where increased fatalities from COVID-19 recently delayed back-to-school plans, many parents unable to provide for their families due to the shutdown have moved their daughters out to their home villages in the countryside, where life can be rugged and tough."**

Program Officer, Abel Moses Mwesigwa

In celebration of World Sexual Health Day, we hosted [a Podcast conversation](#) with community health workers, including our partners at the [Naguru Teenage Information and Health Centre](#) and the Kawala Health Centre, to discuss inclusivity in accessing sexual health services during this pandemic.

Our [latest Girls' Globe post](#) addressed what we are doing to respond to the "communications crisis" coinciding with the current public health crisis of COVID-19. The lack of access to reliable, scientifically-sound information is an issue faced by the hard-to-reach communities we serve: disproportionately affecting women and girls. In this post, we discuss how we have been disseminating information through our Community Health Drives to empower communities with correct knowledge and information.

