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Preliminary assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth in Africa

Uganda, Malawi
Botswana, Nigeria &
Sierra Leone

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COVID-19 
**LOCK
DOWN**

How is
COVID-19
affecting the youth
in Africa?



1. Introduction and Background

The impact of COVID-19 will have a far reaching impact in Africa. Currently, this scourge is affecting youth and children including disadvantaged groups such as young women and adolescent girls in multiple ways such as health, social, economic and it has raised human rights concerns. The impact of COVID-19 on youth and children cannot be fully understood as it is an ongoing phenomenon.

Indeed, some of the early impact of COVID-19 pandemic identified include:

- Disruption of the current school year which has negatively impacted girls and boys, young women and men. However, for children in the rural and peri-urban areas, this means they are further disadvantaged because there is completely no access to learning, as opposed to those in urban set up where online education has been embraced at some extent.
- The school closures have in turn affected psychological and social well-being, and led to increased mental health concerns. Across the African continent, children and young adults from poor backgrounds have no access to school meals and other essential social services such as e-learning. Moreover, the disruption of schools in many parts would also result in the risk of children and youth to drop out of school permanently, as most are required to support families and work in their households.
- Children on move and youth in transition including those in refugee and IDP camps have limited or no access to essential services such as health care and protection that are further compounded by the pandemic and threaten the lives of children and youth in these circumstances.
- COVID-19 pandemic has occasioned an increase in youth unemployment and loss of income for families and those who depend on the informal sector and subsistence agriculture, leading to hunger and poverty.
- As more families continue to lose jobs, many children will be left unprotected as poverty increases. Currently, there are many children that are going hungry, as a result insecurity and violent crimes have also increased by the day, while family evictions and sale of assets are being witnessed.
- The current situation has also occasioned an increase in violent crimes in both public and private spaces. Violence against women and children including sexual violence, exploitation, trafficking, child labour and harmful practices, including child early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation has reportedly increased as more and more people are fighting for their survival.
- Human rights abuse has been on the rise as African Governments continue to enforce state of emergency and / or state of disaster management measures in the wake of the COVID -19 pandemic.
- The already constrained civic space is either closed or narrowing.

This is the first attempt at documenting how COVID-19 is affecting the youth in African countries. This will contribute towards identifying youth priorities in the network's response. A State of Emergency / Disaster has been declared in Botswana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. In Uganda, the President announced a curfew and a lockdown without declaring a State of Emergency.

2. Methodology

This preliminary assessment of the Socio-Economic impact of COVID-19 on African youth is based on a conversation with youth leaders from Botswana, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Uganda on experience of their communities and it is anecdotal.

The quantitative data was collected through a structured online survey developed by Relativ in partnership with SocialSuite and Salesforce. 47 young people from South Africa, Zambia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Malawi and Uganda participated in the survey.

3. Impact on African Youth

3.1. Economic Impact:

The economic impact comes in the form of loss of income and employment. The lockdown has had a serious impact on youth employment; some have lost their jobs and others cannot carry out their day to day economic activities to secure livelihoods. Those who were employed have not been receiving salaries from their employers and therefore have lost their income for the duration of the lockdown. This has led to young people not being able to afford to pay rent nor buy food. Some governments have allocated a certain amount of funds to provide food parcels to communities that are poor and have lost their income due to lock down, however, many have complained that the food parcels never reached them, or only a selected few were given those. They are also not able to obtain financial assistance like loans.

In Uganda, many companies have written to their employees that their employment contracts are being terminated due to the COVID-19 crisis that has affected their income. Civil society organisations are also putting salary cuts on most of their employees or else they stay as volunteers. This challenge was put before the President by the Minister for Trade during the last week presidential address. The President provided no answer, and said the cabinet would discuss the matter. No feedback has been received yet.

Those who are involved in farming could not sell their produce. This has led to farmers being forced to sell at a very low prices. In Botswana, there are people who received permits to sell supplies to supermarkets and chain stores and are buying produce from farmers at a very low price. In Uganda, those who have resources are buying land and other properties from the poor at very low rates as the poor are in a desperate state due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

Due to many not receiving income, the government of Botswana has decided that citizens should not pay rent until the end of July.

In rural areas, the poor are becoming poorer because most of them are informal traders who used to sell their produce on the streets, but due to COVID-19 lockdown, they are no longer allowed on the streets. The youth, street vendors, women and children are suffering the most.

In Sierra Leone, economic activities have dwindled immensely due to inter-district lockdown and curfew. Hunger and starvation are on a rise because many are petty traders who live on their daily sales. Agricultural productivity is at its lowest ebb. Poor subsistence rural farmers cannot effectively carry out

regular farming activities due to fear of being arrested and fined. Farming has timelines, when one misses a particular moment, they miss out on the whole planting season.

Employment & Income



44%

of people feel that their job is at risk as a result of COVID-19



83%

of people say that their spending habits have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic



78%

of people say that they are unable to continue providing for their families as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

With regards to fear around unemployment and loss of income, 44% of the respondents felt that their job was at risk as a result of COVID-19, and 83 % stated that their spending habits have changed because of the pandemic. In regards to being able to afford food and other basic necessities during the pandemic, 78 % indicated that they are unable to continue providing for their families as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Access to Basic Needs & Services



72%

of people are worried that their household supplies will run out



61%

of people are worried that they would not be able to afford basic supplies

Concerning access to basic needs and services, 72 % of the youth who took part in the survey indicated that their households supplies will run out, and 61% were worried that they would not be able to afford basic supplies.

When lockdown is lifted, many will struggle to maintain the same standard of living they used to live prior to COVID-19 disruptions. Many won't have land, jobs, and whatever they used to make a living from. Most households will no longer be able to pay their bills for basic needs such as electricity, water and sanitation. Many children and youth (From kindergarten up to tertiary) will be forced to drop out of school due to parents and guardians losing their jobs or sources of income. There is also a possibility of famine, as many households would have lost their income, and those who used to make their living from farming, might not be able to farm any more post lockdown and COVID-19 crisis.

3.2. Social impact

The social impact of COVID -19 is manifested in the form of community resilience, social distancing and isolation, sense of community and safety, access to basic needs and services.

The closure of schools and universities as well as youth services is affecting their psychological and social well-being, increased mental health concerns. In addition, the children who used to be beneficiaries of school meals are facing starvation as many of them were the only decent meal they were getting.

In Uganda, people are experiencing trauma, but counselling services are not easily accessible. High number of cases of domestic violence have been recorded during this period. Cases of incest and rape have increased. This, in few months might manifest in unwanted pregnancies that will result into unsafe abortion and death of girls but there is a lot of silence on other issues as focus is on Covid-19. This is also the case for Botswana; suicide is also an issue in the country. Depression is creeping in for a lot of people due to losing their jobs and being isolated from society for an extended period. There are NGOs offering free counselling through phone calls to people.

Resilience



66%

of people have a stress rating of 7 or more out of 10

Loneliness & Social Isolation



28%

of people feel lonely



39%

of people do not maintain regular virtual contact with friends and family

With regards to the stress brought about by the pandemic, 66% of the respondents have a stress rating of 7 or more out of 10, and with regards to loneliness and connecting with people, 28 % stated that they felt lonely and 39 % stated that they do not maintain regular virtual contact with friends and family.

Anxiety and Fear around Mortality



67%

of people are worried about being infected by COVID-19



22%

of people believe themselves and their family would not recover if they were to become infected



33%

of people do not have access to accurate facts and information on when to get tested for COVID-19



39%

of people do not have access to accurate facts and information on when to self-quarantine

In addition to feeling lonely, 67 % of the respondents are worried about contracting the virus and 22 % feel that themselves and their families not recovering if infected with COVID-19. 39% indicated that they do not have accurate facts and information on when to self-quarantine

Concerning youth and education, the disruption of essential social service and that of the school year have negatively impacted young people, especially for rural youth who do not have access to the alternative mediums of education (internet, Radio, TV).

In Nigeria, some schools have resorted to e-learning platforms to teach but unfortunately these are for children in average/above average income households. In Uganda, there are efforts by governments and media houses to have learning sessions on TV, radio and Internet. The big challenge is the accessibility of these in rural areas. In Botswana, there is no internet for most rural communities to access study materials.

Botswana has declared the state of emergency for 6 months. If the 6 months lockdown goes ahead, it means that the entire academic year (at all levels) will have to be repeated the following year. E-learning has been introduced, but a lot of families do not have access to the internet to access the lessons. Those in rural areas are the ones seriously affected.

3.3. Impact on Human rights

In many rural areas in Nigeria, the lockdown has been total as opposed to the partial lockdown that's been effected in more urban settings. There has been a complete breakdown of socio-economic activities and unfortunately, this has led to an increase in crime. Some states are partially locked down while some are fully locked down. This is because the Nigerian government did not effect a National lockdown. Each state government makes the decision to either do a total or a partial lockdown based on a number of factors. A police woman was shot on the streets by members of a state task force for defending some citizens against wrongful arrests. There have been about five more cases of citizens being shot by the police in the last couple of weeks for flouting the lockdown directives in some areas. Some people have also been physical assaulted by police and soldiers in many areas as well.

In Uganda, in some cases, it's beyond arrest to brutality in a way of enforcing the curfew and lockdown. There is also cases where local leaders especially male have asked for sex from females in exchange for food or being put on the list of potential beneficiaries. This is also happening in Nigeria, and in some instances it was reported that the females had actually offered to exchange sex for food out of desperation. This further is probably going to lead to the spread of several sexually transmitted diseases, violence and denial.

In Sierra Leone, there is inter Districts lockdown at the moment that came in after an initial three-day lockdown countrywide. During the three-day lockdown people were mercilessly beaten by security forces when they went to get the essential day to day things like water. The rate of criminal activities has increased and social life has been disrupted. In a rural fishing community in Tombo, irritated youths have resorted to violence, attacking and destroying a police structure, throwing stones, beating inhabitants because they were told to ration boats for fishing of 25 boats, 10 should be out fishing each day. Some arrests were made and human rights groups are making some efforts. Government had to effect an immediate curfew which has made things worse. In Botswana crime has really reduced because the military and the police are always moving around patrolling during the day and night.

Malawi is yet to have the total lockdown as some human rights Activists are challenging its implementation in court. The lockdown is affecting young people on SRHR. For example, lack of privacy which may lead to stigma and discrimination as the people are told to stay in one house, and mostly the significant percent of people's houses are very small. So for example, if one is on medication, they may fail to even live their normal life hence adherence becomes a problem.

In Sierra Leone, stigmatization is also having its bite especially on those who are quarantined due to contact tracing. Upon completion of 14 days of compulsory quarantine, they are largely stigmatized by their communities.

In Nigeria stigmatization hasn't been an issue. People who have been quarantined and those who tested positive, got treatment and later tested negative have received immense support. The National Centre for Disease Control and state governments have been very proactive in getting ahead of cases, ensuring timely tests for those showing symptoms and so on. It hasn't been perfect but it's been impressive.

Sense of Community and Safety



67%

of people say that social distancing has had a negative impact on their community



89%

of people feel that the vulnerable members of their community are not well supported during this time



67%

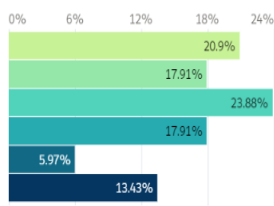
of people do not feel safe going out

With regards to social distancing and safety, 67 % of the respondents from the survey indicated that social distancing has had a negative impact on their community, 89% felt that the vulnerable members of their community are not well supported during this time, and 67 % indicated that they did not feel safe going out.

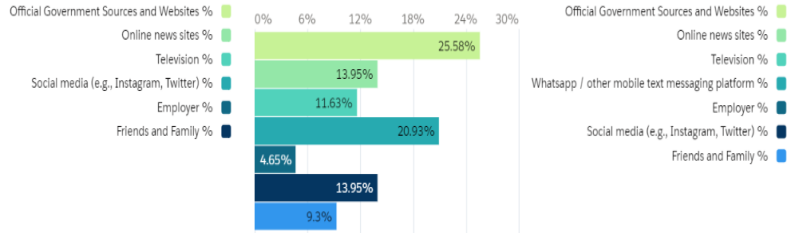
In Botswana there is no space for youth to voice their concerns. Young people usually vent on social media mainly Facebook but some got arrested because it's regarded as fake news. They have been trying to advocate for clothing shops to be opened so that expectant mothers may buy clothes as well as winter clothing as winter has kicked in but it's falling on deaf's ears. Instead the government has been calling on the society to donate old clothes which will be given to newborn babies. Gender-based violence is also on a rise, different CSOs have come together to advocate for government intervention especially with housing and provision of essential services for those in shelters. CSOs are also asking for donations from the public.

In Nigeria, the government is moved to action when issues trend online. In Uganda participation in discussion making especially at local levels has been cut off by what the President has described as a situation of war.

Current mechanisms for receiving information about COVID-19



Preferred mechanisms to receive information about COVID-19



The above graphs indicates that the majority of respondents are receiving information about COVID-19 from their preferred mechanism. 9.3 % indicated that they would also like to receive information about the pandemic from their friends and family.

4. Response to COVID-19: Social safety nets

The Nigerian government has announced an intervention for over 1 million households last week of April, however it still has not been implemented for a number of reasons. There isn't an adequate record in terms of data needed to reach the targeted "vulnerable people". Many do not have bank accounts, national ID cards, they are not on any social register and so many more issues. Young people in Nigeria do not have access to the Federal Government (FG) Palliatives (sponsored funds to mitigate the effects of the lockdown) because they are not eligible. Only those of a certain age group are eligible. Private individuals have been more proactive in this regard. There has been food parcels donations, money and so on, from private individuals to rural communities and the less privileged.

In Botswana, food parcels are given to those that have always been taken care of by the government - the less privileged. They have a card that is recharged with \$60 dollars every month for food. But this time around, they had other food that is being donated by different organisations so it might be sufficient. Access for everyone else is low. Government has said that the unemployed youths will also benefit, especially the food parcels but they are still waiting. There have been complaints about the criteria being used to assist citizens with food parcels, many deserving citizens have been excluded from the assessment and food distribution. Most poor people have run out of food and basic necessities.

The Ugandan parliament has passed a supplementary budget to the ministry of health only. Giving food parcels to the communities is a presidential directive and only a selected few such as former taxi drivers, Bodaboda (motorcycle taxi) who used to earn very little per day. So, this makes other poor members of the communities feel discriminated against. All those who have lost their income due to COVID-19 crisis should be aided by the government. When giving out the directive of the distribution of food parcels, the President emphasised on this not being a poverty alleviation project.

"This is not a poverty alleviation project or a project for poor people but support to the very few who were living by very little income and by hand to mouth", said the President of Uganda - Yoweri Kaguta Museveni.

In Uganda, people with disabilities are also heavily affected by this crisis. Social safety especially in the informal village or family based have somehow helped. It could have been sufficient to but it has been stretched. For example, elderly persons in the village were supported with about USD 10. But now their

children and grandchildren are back with them in the villages and no other source of income. There are other new categories. But the support in Uganda's case is 6 kg of corn flour, 2kg of beans. Going forward, these need to be empowered in future as well as get formalised so that they can get benefits like loans. People who got food two weeks ago are already hungry again and the government has said it doesn't have capacity to give more food; so such people are selling property for those who had them. Less than 10% of the needy population has got the government food, for example, only Kampala District and not the whole of it yet. The formal safety / support by the government have been stretched too because most of the funds have been diverted to support quarantine centres and COVID-19 patients. There is a need for deliberate advocacy and other actions to strengthen the safety nets as well as create awareness and their importance among the poor population.

In Sierra Leone, there is no emergency economic response strategy at all. The youth suggests that an emergency economic response strategy should be devised taking into consideration poverty alleviation, debt relief, social safety nets, livelihood programs, job creation especially in the mining, agricultural and infrastructure sectors, coupled with government's involvement in Human Capital Development.

5. Conclusion

COVID-19 is essentially a public health crisis that is affecting youth in African countries in multiple ways. Understandably, this is a crisis that needs to be attended to, however other issues affecting the communities, particularly youth, should not be neglected. The preliminary economic and social impact is being felt as youth and households are losing their sources income and livelihoods, the social distancing measures have disrupted the schools and other social services. In poor countries, most people work in an informal economy and need to work every day to put food on the table. The lockdown has put a halt to economic activity and that can get rapidly disastrous. Most states have limited budgets and capacity to support their locked-down population. It is understood that the coverage of the social safety nets is limited and unable to reach all those who need it the most. The lockdown is also limiting the youth and vulnerable households to access their basic needs and services. The enforcement of lockdown is raising human rights issues especially for youth and households who are most vulnerable.

Note: This draft is based on the survey administered with 47 young people in mentioned countries as well as an online conversation of the following youth leaders

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