



WorldYWCA

## How Your Support Shaped #YWCA CovidResponse



**Impact Stories from the Heart of  
Communities**

September - December 2020

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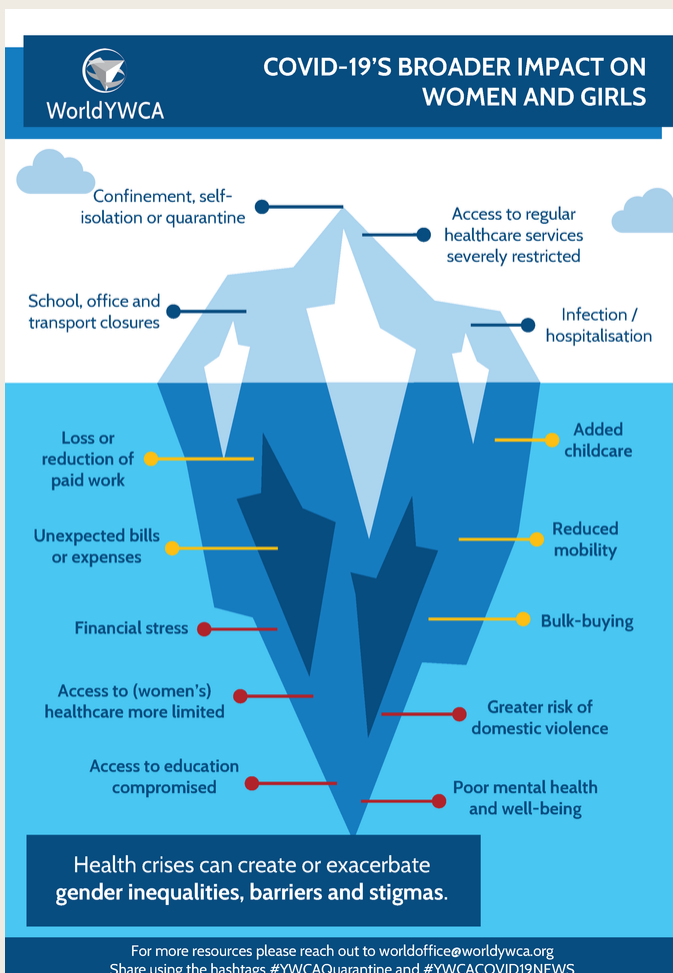
# Overview

The prevailing global COVID-19 pandemic became a prolonged threat to life as we know it, affecting every person indiscriminately while amplifying and heightening all existing inequalities. Across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impact of COVID-19 is exacerbated for women, young women and girls worldwide by virtue of their sex.<sup>[1]</sup>

For many women, young women and girls, navigating the COVID-19 pandemic became more frightening, dangerous, and uncertain because of multiple and intersecting challenges that they face. Many face the realities of child care, looking after family members, discrimination, domestic violence, additional financial strains resulting from a reduction in income and unexpected bills, limited access to healthcare, among other challenges.

The YWCA movement is practiced at the art of being agile and creative in response to the unique needs of every community that it serves and the challenges of every era. When the COVID-19 outbreak was announced in early 2020, YWCA immediately became part of the global response. YWCA leaders continue resolutely in their role as problem solvers, caretakers, agents of change, and supporters in their communities and families.

Relevant and community-based actions manifested YWCA's purpose and vision towards justice, gender equality, and a world without violence and war. Some of these included providing necessary care, support, resources, and safe spaces needed for girls, young women, and women to become more resilient in times of crisis.



In April 2020, the World YWCA launched a fundraising campaign called the [COVID Crisis Response Fund](#) to ensure a wider reach and response to the pandemic. The campaign's primary purpose was to assist YWCA member associations (MAs) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the heart of communities and in the most vulnerable parts of the world. The fundraising campaign focused on addressing the issues in the [World YWCA iceberg illustration](#) that highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on women, young women, and girls – some effects being apparent, while others going unseen.

[1] UN Secretary-General's policy brief: The impact of COVID-19 on women

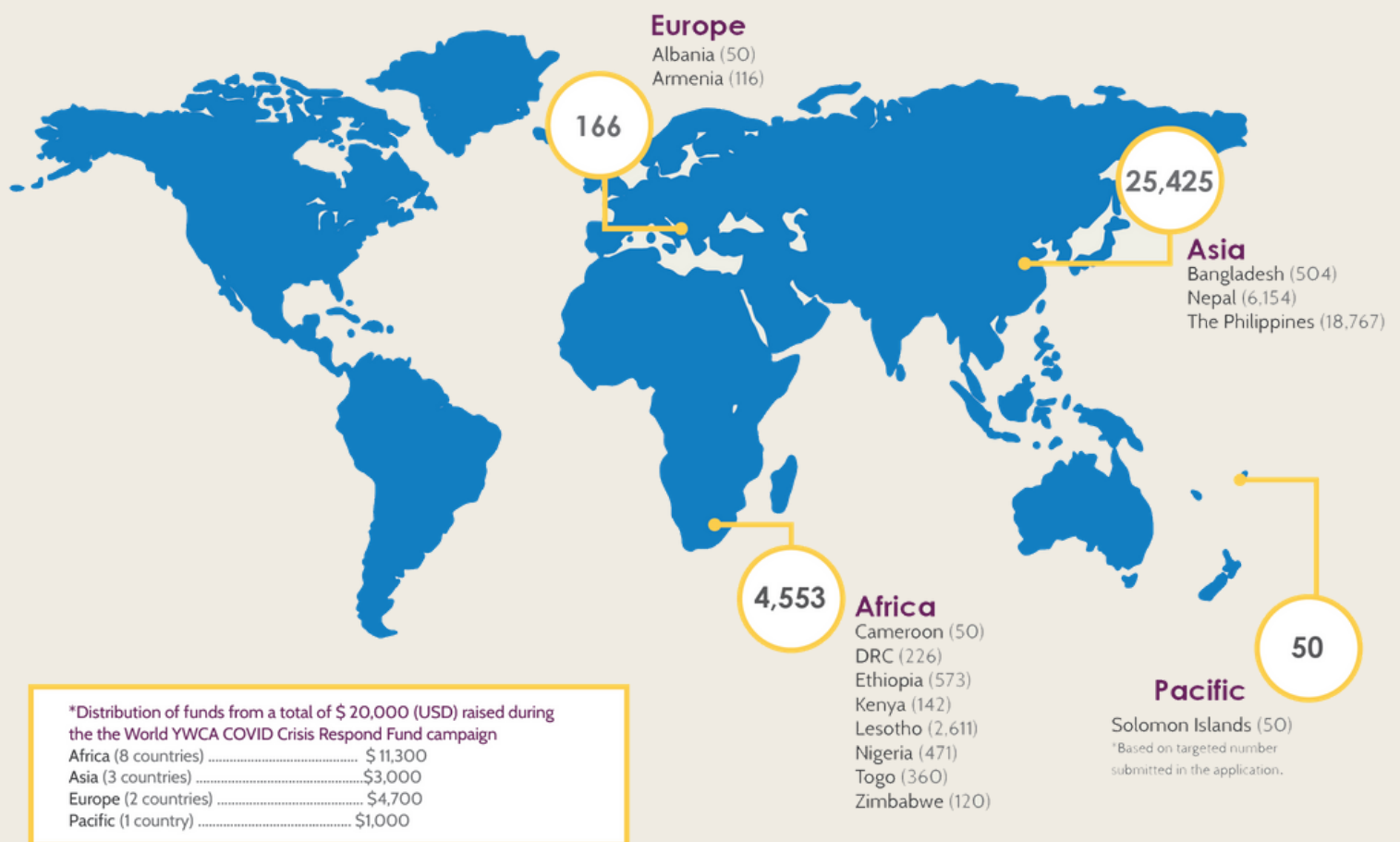
The World YWCA received considerable support for this campaign, and these efforts enabled the first round of funding for YWCA projects in community responding to the emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic. The projects targeted women, young women, and girls in 14 different countries facing multiple challenges and threats to their livelihoods in times of crisis. The interventions impacted more than 30,000 people and serve as a support system for women, young women, and girls navigating issues such as low income in their households, armed conflict, lack of accurate and timely information on COVID-19, no access to protective equipment and healthcare services, special care conditions, gender-based violence and constraints to their physical and mental health.

This report summarizes each of the different projects implemented through this funding, led by YWCA member associations in Albania, Armenia, Bangladesh, Cameroon, DRC, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Lesotho, Nepal, Nigeria, the Solomon Islands, the Philippines, Togo, and Zimbabwe.

\*Photos and quotes featured in this report were provided by YWCA member associations with prior consent and approval.

## People reached per region

The number of people reached varied based on the different approaches used in each intervention, the prioritisation of certain target groups, the context of COVID-19 in each country, and the specific project goals in each response to the pandemic.





# Tending to the needs of women with breast cancer during COVID-19

Project implemented by YWCA Albania



Tirana, Korca, Vlora,  
Librazhd, Shkodra, Berat,  
Lezha, Albania



Respond to the needs of women and young women with breast cancer who have been highly impacted by isolation, reduction of income, and an overall decrease of health and life quality.

## Background

While COVID-19 is a global phenomenon, it has impacted cancer patients, their families, and caregivers disproportionately. For women and young women with breast cancer in Albania it has affected just about every aspect of life, including screening, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up care. People diagnosed with breast cancer and ill patients are more vulnerable to infection than the general population and are at higher risk of serious complications if they contract the virus.

The pandemic has also disrupted or delayed cancer treatments due to an overwhelmed health system. In addition, many breast cancer patients face a substantial loss of income and a general decrease in their life quality due to fear, isolation, and movement restrictions.

## Intervention

The YWCA of Albania's work is rooted in the needs of local communities and is made possible through the relationships and trust that local women have built over time. With previous experience of working with women and young women with breast cancer and the awareness of the harsh realities affecting them, YWCA Albania led a project to further understand and respond to their unique needs and experiences as they navigated the COVID-19 emergency.

YWCA Albania mobilised staff, partners and volunteers to distribute selected quality food and hygiene products to women and young women currently or previously diagnosed with breast cancer. The distribution was developed in small groups, respecting social distancing protocols and providing with critical resources and protection rules on COVID-19 to avoid infection.

The recipients' selection was made through YWCA's networks to reach the most affected women and young women. Considering budget limitations, the YWCA conducted a thorough assessment reviewing unique needs and carefully identifying where aid was required the most. Recipients selected were all vulnerable women and young women from different cities and nearby villages in Tirana, Korca, Vlora, Librazhd, Shkodra, Berat, Lezha.

The aid packages represented an enormous relief to the women and young women and contributed to the improvement of their nutrition, health and hygiene needs and ease the stress that follows due to vulnerability and uncertainty. As one of the recipients shared:

"DUE TO MY ILLNESS, I AM MORE AT RISK TO THE VIRUS. I AM VERY FEARFUL. FOR 2 MONTHS, I HAVE ONLY BEEN HOME AND AVOIDED CONTACT WITH OTHERS. THANK YOU FOR THE FOOD AND HYGIENE PRODUCTS. THESE CAN KEEP ME HEALTHIER".



As part of the project, YWCA Albania also actively participated in awareness campaigns on COVID-19 promoted by the World Health Organization. The campaigns advocated for rapid mobilization and stronger cooperation to provide accurate information as part of an effective response, especially for populations at a higher risk. As an important outcome, the project also served to offer a space to increase women and young women's confidence to seek treatment and support when needed while preventing the potential threats of infection.

Click [here](#) to view the World Health Organization safety advice.



# Hope and transformation during conflict

Project implemented by YWCA Armenia



Rural areas of Noyemberyan,  
Tavush Region



Create safe spaces for young women  
and girls in rural areas affected by  
conflict and the COVID-19 crisis.

## Background

Armenia registered their first case of COVID-19 at the beginning of March 2020. Shortly afterward, the country declared a state of emergency and went into lockdown. During the next coming months, the numbers rose substantially; but by the end of the summer, Armenia was able to flatten the curve of infections. Although there was some increase in the number of daily cases because of schools' opening, Armenia slowly moved towards overcoming the threat from this global pandemic. Unfortunately, this success was short-lived, as another catastrophe began.

An armed conflict began to abruptly increase infections and exacerbate health and economic consequences of the pandemic affecting a broad range of vulnerable populations including women and children. Initial clashes occurred near Movses in Tavush Province of Armenia and the Armenian–Azerbaijani state border. The conflict escalated in September 2020 when Azerbaijan initiated a large-scale war against Nagorno-Karabakh, a breakaway region populated primarily by Armenians.

## Intervention

YWCA of Armenia knows that women suffer the worst consequences of war. For this reason, they have been actively leading peacebuilding efforts and reaching out to the international community to voice the situation in the region. However, the ongoing armed conflict deeply affected the YWCA and the socio-economic fabric in the communities they serve. Many women and young women's voices expressed fear, shock, and anger with the conflict and the pandemic realities. The unprecedented challenges deeply concerned YWCA of Armenia as women and girls were suffering even more threats to their safety and wellbeing by dealing with COVID-19 in times of war.

Misinformation and the ongoing armed conflict increased the spread of the virus in Armenia and increased fear with many people not accessing health facilities. As a women's organization, the YWCA of Armenia strives to be supportive, informed and flexible.

To tackle misinformation and nurture resilience, the YWCA designed a project to raise awareness and provide safe spaces for women and young women struggling with the situation, mainly targeting teenage girls between 14-18 years old living in rural areas. To ensure a holistic approach and the programme's effectiveness, teachers from rural schools and mothers of teenage girls were consulted and involved right from the beginning.



YWCA Armenia safe space for teenage girls

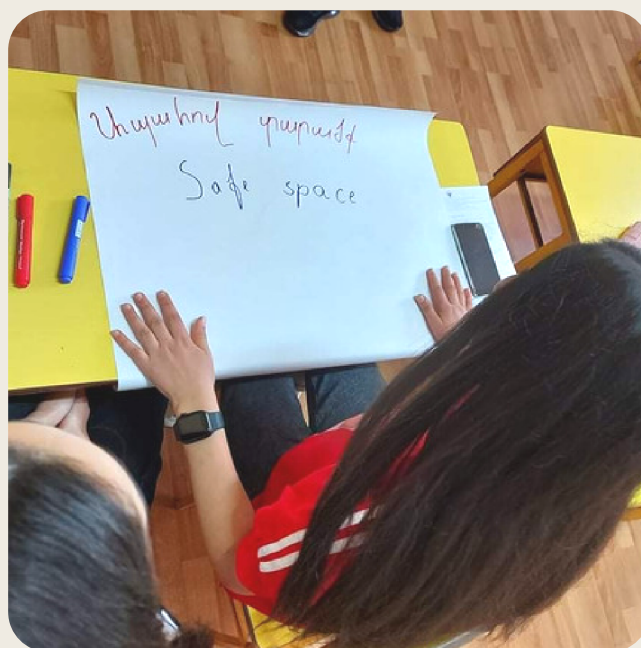


Considering the YWCA's experience in critical topics for women and girls, such as sexual reproductive health and rights and mental health, the safe spaces became a way to provide accurate information on the ongoing pandemic and for participants to share, learn and reflect on other key issues affecting them. Some of the safe spaces were implemented online using digital tools and social media channels to follow safety protocols. These enabled broader communication and the opportunity to connect despite restrictions and learn new skills innovatively.

Women and girls were also able to develop creative ways of COVID-19 prevention and coping mechanisms for themselves, their peers, and the community. Leadership skills were fostered in workshops, seminars, and knowledge sharing sessions through an intergenerational approach where some even learn how to create eco-friendly bags and facemasks.



Learning how to make masks in an intergenerational workshop



Safe spaces became a way for participants to share, learn and reflect on issues affecting them.

The YWCA also provided women and their families with essential products to prevent COVID-19 transmissions, such as hand sanitizer, gloves, and soap. Additionally, women and girls received menstrual hygiene kits and towels to ensure adequate menstrual hygiene and dignity despite mobility restrictions and other constraints.

The project also supported YWCA of Armenia's Child Development Centre, which was heavily disrupted by the COVID-19 emergency. The YWCA used part of the project's grant to increase the center's capacity by equipping it with bedding, sleeping accessories, dishes, and other vital expenses to ensure a safe and supportive environment for 40 children and their mothers.

At the end of the project, the YWCA of Armenia helped boost hope and resilience for women and young women within their different and creative activities and support their children by improving their services in the Child Development Centre.

To learn more about the different activities implemented by YWCA Armenia, click [here](#) to view their Facebook page.





# Leading the fight against gender-based violence and COVID-19

Project implemented by YWCA Bangladesh



Districts of Barishal, Khulna, Gopalganj and Jashore in Bangladesh



Support the emergency the pandemic was becoming for young women and girls living in communities vulnerable to COVID-19 transmission, and facing challenges due to movement restrictions.

## Background

Like other countries globally, COVID-19 threw Bangladeshi families, communities, and the economy in distress and hardship, particularly for women and girls facing gender-based violence. With mobility restrictions due to COVID-19, a sense of insecurity and lack of general awareness among parents became reasons for a recent surge in child marriage. This practice puts girls at a high risk of violence and jeopardizes their ability to decide on their future.

Other forms of violence against women and girls, such as domestic violence, have also risen significantly as the pandemic continues to impact communities.

## Intervention

YWCA of Bangladesh has rallied and mobilized for women and girls' rights and leadership in local communities long before the pandemic started. Together with other local and national stakeholders, they have continuously participated in various events and dialogues with government and decision-makers to reinforce the law against rape, promote counseling girls to continue their studies, and extend support to gender-based violence survivors.

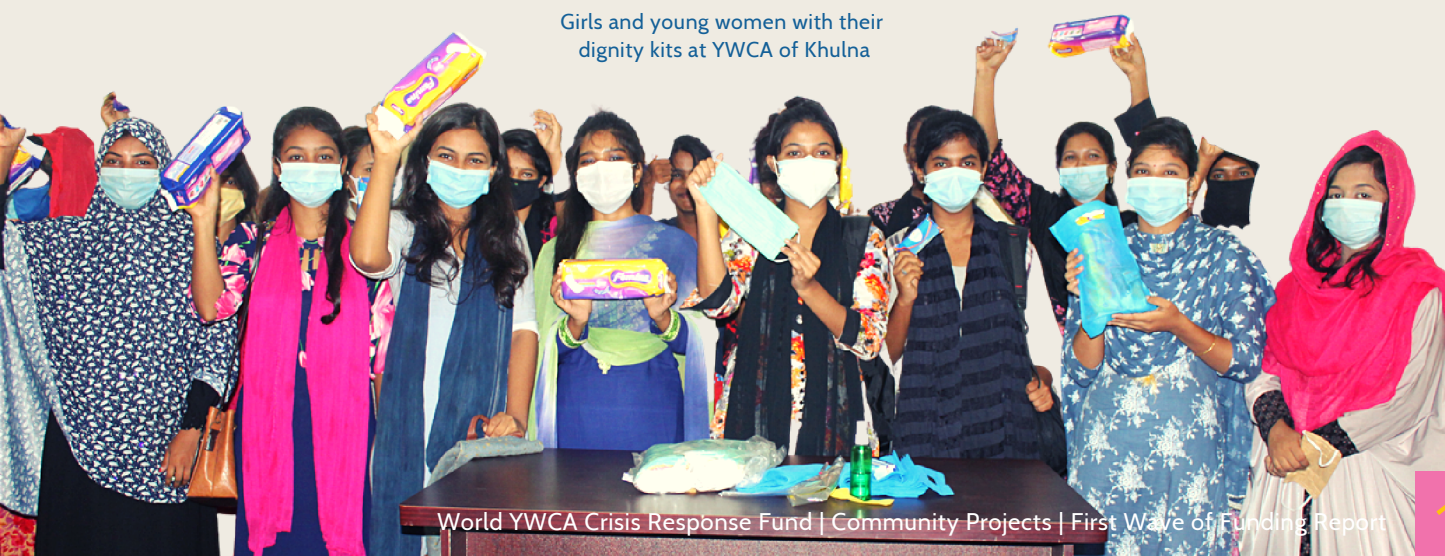
With this background in mind, YWCA of Bangladesh implemented a project that supports the protection of vulnerable young women and girls and equips them with critical knowledge against gender-based violence and COVID-19.

In each of the four districts where the project was implemented, young women leaders conducted trainings and awareness sessions to share knowledge regarding COVID-19, menstrual hygiene, and gender gender-based violence. These sessions were conducted as safe spaces where participants could speak freely about topics usually considered taboo in Bangladesh, such as menstrual hygiene and management. As one of the young women shared:

“EVEN THOUGH I AM 21, ONLY AFTER ATTENDING THE SESSIONS, I REALIZED MY MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRACTICES AND MANAGEMENT WERE NOT SAFE AND HYGIENIC. MY KNOWLEDGE OF COVID 19 WAS ALSO REVEALED TO BE INADEQUATE AND MISGUIDED BY MYTHS”.

Virtual groups on social media platforms were created to engage and foster networking and collaboration among young women from different districts. Facilitators also discussed the role and responsibilities of group members and provided linkage and contact numbers of their local health care providers and emergency hotlines numbers to seek help and support services in case of gender-based violence.

Girls and young women with their dignity kits at YWCA of Khulna



The young women committed to working as advocates for women's rights, to eradicate gender-based violence, and promote equality. As a ripple effect, 344 young women and girls were engaged in the different activities and sessions conducted during the project.

For three months, dignity kits with essential prevention and hygiene products were distributed to 160 young women and girls maintaining health and safety measures. The dignity kits included sanitary pads, soap and face masks.

YWCA of Bangladesh also provided and disseminated information on COVID-19 transmission, prevention, symptoms and awareness, menstrual hygiene, and gender-based violence. Leaflets/stickers, wristbands were distributed among the community and placed in accessible public places like; markets, community halls, and stations for a broader impact.



Distribution of dignity kits in YWCA of Khulna



Distributing information among the local community in Jashore

As part of a movement that connects and mobilizes the power of millions of women, young women, and girls advocating against all forms of gender-based violence,

YWCA Bangladesh created an important platform for young women and girls in local communities affected by COVID-19 to lead change by protecting their rights, while inspiring and mobilizing peers to do the same.



Young women and girls at a local training with YWCA of Gopalganj



# Transforming power structures in the village of Sakbayemé

Project implemented by YWCA Cameroon



Village of Sakbayemé,  
Cameroon



Raising awareness for COVID-19, facilitating knowledge building, and providing essential hygiene products for rural women and girls in Sakbayemé, Cameroon.

## Background

In the village of Sakbayémé, located 200 km from Yaoundé, Capital of Cameroon, there is only one hospital. Its inadequate conditions make it challenging to provide pertinent health information and equipment needed for COVID-19. Male dominance prevails in this village and have marginalized women and young women when it comes to decisions regarding the pandemic response, even when matters directly impact their lives.

According to the village women, a meeting regarding the pandemic was held between the district's local authority and the chief with dignitaries, where masks and soaps were distributed for the benefit of the people. However, women and girls did not receive any. They had access to neither accurate and reliable information on the pandemic, nor the essential products to protect themselves. Among other barriers, women and girls in Sakbayémé were facing discrimination and harassment. Not including them in the fight against the pandemic was increasing their vulnerability and risk of getting infected.

## Intervention

YWCA of Cameroon believes that enabling young women and girls voices to speak and lead in their community is critical for them to become agents of change and be part of an inclusive and smart response against COVID-19.

In a safe environment, awareness sessions and brainstorming occurred in the local language Bassa'a. Learnings and debunking myths boosted participants' confidence to raise their voices and map out best practices and prevention methods against COVID-19.

As one of the participants, Grace Dissounga, shared:

“THIS TRAINING IS A REAL INNOVATION IN THE VILLAGE, BEFORE WE WERE SIDELINED, BUT TODAY, THANKS TO THE YWCA OF CAMEROON, WE CAN NOW RAISE OUR VOICES AND GIVE OUR OPINION ON COVID-19”.

Additionally, YWCA of Cameroon identified the need for certain essential products for safety and sanitary hygiene, and distributed reusable facemasks, soap and bleach among the women in the village.

With newly acquired knowledge, and now seen as role models in the village, participants share helpful and practical information with relatives and inspire other women and girls in their community to do the same. Some have even reached out to people from surrounding villages.

YWCA Cameroon safe space with women and young women in Sakbayémé, debunking myths on COVID-19



During the project's implementation, women in Sakbayemé were also able to raise their voices and share personal stories regarding the social and economic barriers they face when menstruating and maintaining proper menstrual hygiene and management. Many participants could not speak on the issue or did so reluctantly due to the shame and stigma surrounding periods and the discrimination girls and women face. For many, poverty was also preventing them from being able to afford sanitary products and managing their periods in a way they would prefer.



Young woman speaking out at YWCA of Cameroon awareness session in the village of Sakbayemé

To promote dignified menstruation and period positivity, the YWCA of Cameroon distributed washable sanitary napkin kits and training on using them as a more ecological, economical, hygienic, and easy option for women in the rural locality. As one of the participants shared:



“THANKS TO THESE NAPKINS, MY PARENTS CAN NOW SAVE THE MONEY THEY DON'T HAVE. IN ADDITION THEY ARE EASY TO USE, DO NOT SLIP LIKE SYNTHETICS, AND DON'T ITCH”.



The project demonstrated that women and young women's engagement and leadership are vital to fight the pandemic, transform communities, and create a better, more equal future.


Promoting period positivity and distributing washable sanitary napkins






# Pushing for a gender response to COVID-19

Project implemented by YWCA Ethiopia

 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

 Advocate for a gender-responsive fight against COVID-19 and support pregnant and lactating women, girls, and children in quarantine centers of Addis Ababa.

## Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all countries' socio-economic, political fabric, and Ethiopia was certainly no exception. Shortly after the pandemic's announcement, the Ethiopian government responded by enacting an emergency proclamation state to enforce prevention protocols. However, the response did not acknowledge the different impacts and forms of systemic discrimination already faced by women and girls that the pandemic was exacerbating. Women perform most caring duties in families and immediate communities.



Circumstances like the risks to women health care workers, domestic violence, economic pressures women face, and the dangers posed to them as their general and sexual and reproductive healthcare are withdrawn demonstrated that a gender-neutral approach was just not good enough.

When lockdown restrictions were lifted in September 2020, and many economic activities resumed within the city of Addis Ababa, the number of new infections started rising again and intensifying hardships, particularly for mothers and children struggling in quarantine centres.

## Intervention

The urgency to respond to the immediate need for supplies in these centres drove the YWCA of Ethiopia to mobilise more than 500 sanitary pads, washing soap, and supplementary food for pregnant and lactating women, girls, and children. This mobilisation represented an essential relief to beneficiaries, however, YWCA recognised that a lot more needed to be done to create creating long-lasting positive change.



YWCA Ethiopia provided sanitary pads, washing soap and supplementary food for women and children



Branded masks to promote a gender-sensitive response to COVID-19

In the absence of a gender-sensitive and intersectional response, YWCA Ethiopia decided to act on the matter by lobbying like-minded stakeholders, including civil society organisations and the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA), to join efforts for a gendered response.

This network and partnership enabled a more vital link between local communities and policymakers.



**“A GENDER-NEUTRAL APPROACH TO COVID-19, IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH”.**

YWCA Ethiopia with like-minded stakeholders, including the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs

After assessing the situation, YWCA Ethiopia led a campaign to promote gender responsive COVID-19 prevention and addressing the unmet needs of vulnerable women and girls. They organised a press conference with key broadcast and print media outlets and used other advocacy strategies to influence decision-makers and make the public aware that winning the fight against COVID-19 would only be possible with an inclusive approach.



Members of YWCA Ethiopia promoting COVID-19 prevention, with a focus on gender.

## Hashtags

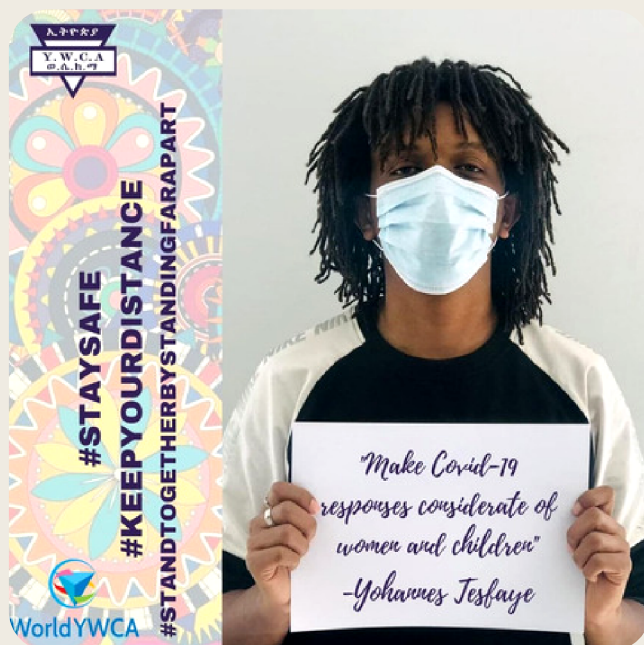
#StandTogetherByStandingApart

#StaySafe

#KeepYourDistance

Advocacy messages in the campaign included evidence and key voices on the unique challenges women and girls experience during a pandemic and the need to mainstream gender in budgeting, and in the COVID-19 action plan to ensure an effective response and recovery interventions.

These efforts triggered a much-needed conversation and served to bring on board allies for gender equality while increasing awareness among the community. The campaign also shed light on how the crisis can be an important opportunity to address structural inequalities that consistently hold women and girls back and re-imagine and transform systems and societies for the better.




Delivery of aid supplies for women, girls and children in quarantine centres in Addis Ababa






# Building resilience in slum communities in Nairobi

Project implemented by YWCA Kenya

 Gituamba, Kiambu, Mukuru and Motherland slums in Nairobi

 Build resilience of teenage girls and young mothers in slums, where violence rates are recorded alarmingly high.

## Background

The COVID -19 pandemic brought numerous challenges to girls, women, and young mothers living in Nairobi's urban slums. The alarming and rising rates of gender-based violence exacerbated their struggle to battle the pandemic under low living and health care conditions. In some cases, harsh economic circumstances have driven young women and mothers to engage in sex for money, compromising their wellbeing and safety by putting them at a higher risk of violence and profoundly impacting their mental health.

# Intervention

YWCA Kenya is known for creating safe spaces in the heart of communities for women, young women, and girls in Kenya and linking them with pertinent social and health care services when needed. Ensuring respect, confidentiality, and a supportive environment for everyone to share and speak without any fear of judgment, are some of the core elements that YWCA puts into practice when creating a safe space.

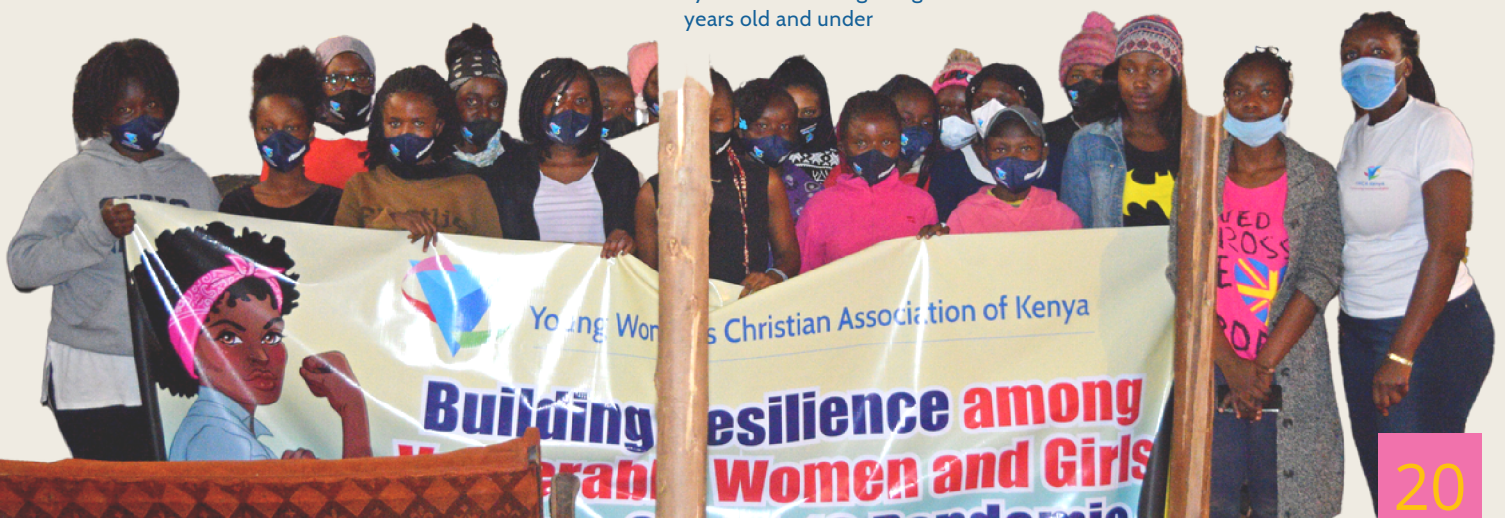
This expertise and the realities in slums drove YWCA Kenya to create a programme to enhance resilience to the pandemic challenges by disseminating critical safety and awareness information, offering psychological and socio-economic support, and providing essential hygiene commodities to women and girls. Initially, YWCA Kenya targeted to cover only three slums in Nairobi due to fund and security limitations. However, thanks to the YWCA's long leadership journey and its network with local leaders, a fourth slum was reached by getting trained champions on board in Gituamba, expanding the project's impact.



YWCA Kenya reaching out to girls in one of the targeted communities

More than 100 girls age 18 years old and under – including girls living with disabilities- gained confidence and became better equipped to practice resilience through interactive safe space sessions. Each session served to foster leadership and address important topics such as sexual reproductive rights, mental health and gender-based violence. Inspired by the sessions, many of the girls chose to become active advocates in social media. They used different digital platforms to highlight the unique challenges and inequalities women and girls faced during pandemic times and championed the need to create a gender-equal society. They were also introduced to an innovative and free mobile app developed by YWCA Kenya that features self-assessment tests for users to evaluate their mental wellbeing. The app also provides a list of counsellors and centres that can be reached when needed.

YWCA Kenya initiative with girls age 18 years old and under



Lucy, a 16-year-old champion from Kiambiu shared:

"I'M HAPPY FOR THIS PROGRAM BROUGHT TO US BY THE YWCA KENYA; WE RARELY GET SUCH OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT AND ADDRESS OUR SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (SRH) AND MENTAL HEALTH. SINCE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC STRUCK, IT HAS NOT BEEN EASY FOR ME AND MY SISTERS IN THE SLUMS WITH THE SCHOOLS CLOSED. SOME OF OUR FRIENDS ARE PREGNANT, AND SADLY THEY WILL NOT BE GOING BACK TO SCHOOL WHEN CORONA IS GONE. DURING THE YWCA TRAINING, I HAVE LEARNED A LOT ABOUT SRH AND HOW TO MAINTAIN MY MENTAL WELLNESS IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THE ISSUES AND STRESS FACTORS. MY MOST IMMENSE JOY WAS LEARNING TO USE THE YWCA'S APP, WHICH I HAVE SHARED WITH MY FRIENDS, AND THEY ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE FREE DIGITAL SAFE SPACE THAT WILL KEEP OUR MENTAL STATE IN CHECK. MY WISH IS TO HAVE MORE PROGRAMS LIKE THESE IN OUR COMMUNITIES BECAUSE MANY GIRLS STILL LACK SRH AND MENTAL HEALTH RESILIENCE KNOWLEDGE".

YWCA Kenya also distributed masks to the community while promoting the hashtag #StopGBV (Stop Gender-Based Violence) and setting up posters with hotlines to call in cases of gender-based violence attacks. During the campaigns, safety protocols and health guidelines were carefully followed in all physical campaigns to avoid the slightest infection risk.

Through the project, young mothers aged 30 and under found a unique safe space for entrepreneurship such as soap-making training and were inspired to explore other income-generating opportunities. The YWCA also helped establish sanitary banks in Kiambiu and Gituamba to reduce the economic burden on menstruating women and girls.

The end of project assessment highlighted YWCA Kenya's flexibility, creativity, and agility in responding and adapting to the rapidly changing pandemic situation, especially in reaching vulnerable and marginalised communities.

Soap making training with young mothers





# Bringing a community together for women and girls in Lesotho

Project implemented by YWCA Lesotho



Districts of Maseru (capital city of Lesotho), Berea and Mafeteng, Lesotho.



Leading community dialogues to support women and young women affected by COVID-19 in the districts of Maseru, Berea, and Mafeteng.

## Background

Lesotho, a high-altitude, landlocked kingdom encircled by the Republic of South Africa, was the last African nation to confirm that COVID-19 reached their territory. Due to its unique location surrounded by another country, it was expected that as the pandemic escalated in South Africa, a wave of infection would shortly follow and impact the nation of approximately two million Basotho people.

Women, young women, and girls in Lesotho carry the brunt of housework, including caregiving for children, the ill, and the elderly. Their role as caregivers puts them at higher risk of infection, loss of income, food insecurity, and isolation from the support structures that typically enable them to cope with their challenges.

Outside of the context of an emergency, gender-based violence is rife in women and girls' everyday life. But during a lockdown, where people and their families are confined to small living places, increasing tension in communities and households aggravates the risk of violence against women and girls, even in their own homes.

## Intervention

With these overarching concerns, YWCA Lesotho responded by contributing to efforts to prevent and respond to the rising gender-based violence cases in COVID-19 affected communities. The YWCA facilitated community dialogues to transform attitudes towards women and girls and ensured psycho-social support to those impacted by COVID-19 in the districts of Maseru, Berea, and Mafeteng.

YWCA Lesotho worked together with different community actors, engaging with policy officers, social workers, media outlets, faith leaders from different local churches, area chiefs, and local government councilors to ensure the inclusion of relevant community-based structures.

The YWCA mobilised hundreds of women and young women to be part of the community dialogues, providing a space to voice the risks posed to them by COVID-19 and to acquire critical knowledge to protect themselves from different forms of gender-based violence.

Nazareth, an adolescent girl from Maseru district shared:

“NOT BEING IN SCHOOLS HAVE RESULTED IN MORE UNPLANNED AND UNWANTED PREGNANCIES. IN THE COMMUNITY WE LIVE IN, ONCE A GIRL GETS PREGNANT, THEY HAVE TO GET HER MARRIED REGARDLESS OF HER AGE. HENCE, THE CHILD MARRIAGE ISSUE CONTINUES TO RISE”.



YWCA Lesotho in one of the community dialogues held in Berea district



Community dialogue for adolescents and youth led by YWCA Lesotho in Nazareth Ha Phaloane in the district of Maseru

The YWCA, together with leaders provided group counselling and spiritual counselling for psychosocial support to women and young women. Those who needed individual sessions were referred to the auxiliary social workers based at the community councils under the Ministry of Social Development. A total number of 579 people were reached.

Connecting with local media outlets secured slots in radio and television programmes to raise awareness on how COVID-19 impacts women and girls differently while increasing the risk of gender-based violence. Advocacy in digital channels like social media platforms served to expand the message's reach to a broader audience.

As a critical action to mitigate the spread and reduce infection likelihood, the YWCA produced and distributed branded masks that included toll-free numbers for reporting gender-based violence. To reinforce the message, the distribution of brochures and flyers to women and community members provided them with accurate information on the impact and risks of COVID-19 on women and girls.

The project's initiative emphasized the importance and the positive results that can be achieved when different community members play an active and meaningful role in improving the lives of women, young women, and girls. Creating awareness and sharing the right information supported the community to make informed decisions on how to battle COVID-19 and keep women and girls safe from violence.

Lack of food, gender-based violence, and child marriage were some of the major concerns in Mafetang. The high rate of unemployment especially due to COVID 19 has triggered parents to find child marriage as a resort out of poverty.







# Enabling coping mechanisms for young women in Kathmandu

Project implemented by YWCA Nepal



Bansighat slum,  
Kathmandu, Nepal



Enabling coping mechanisms for  
vulnerable young women and girls in  
Bansighat slum.

## Background

Women in Nepal have long experienced high poverty levels, social exclusion, and marginalization because of their gender. While the pandemic has affected people everywhere, it has been extra challenging for disadvantaged social groups living in vulnerable situations. For young women in Kathmandu facing multiple layers of discrimination, the pandemic's health and economic impacts are being borne disproportionately, leaving them emotionally drained.

Many of the fears and anxieties that these young women experience are also triggered by the spread of misinformation and lack of knowledge about the virus. The tide of COVID-19-related content that is often inaccurate or false can also produce panic and acute adverse effects on mental health while increasing infection risk.

## Intervention

To equip young women and girls with accurate information and debunk myths on COVID-19, YWCA Nepal led informative sessions and counselling by conducting a safe space where everyone was encouraged to share their stories and actively participate in the conversation.



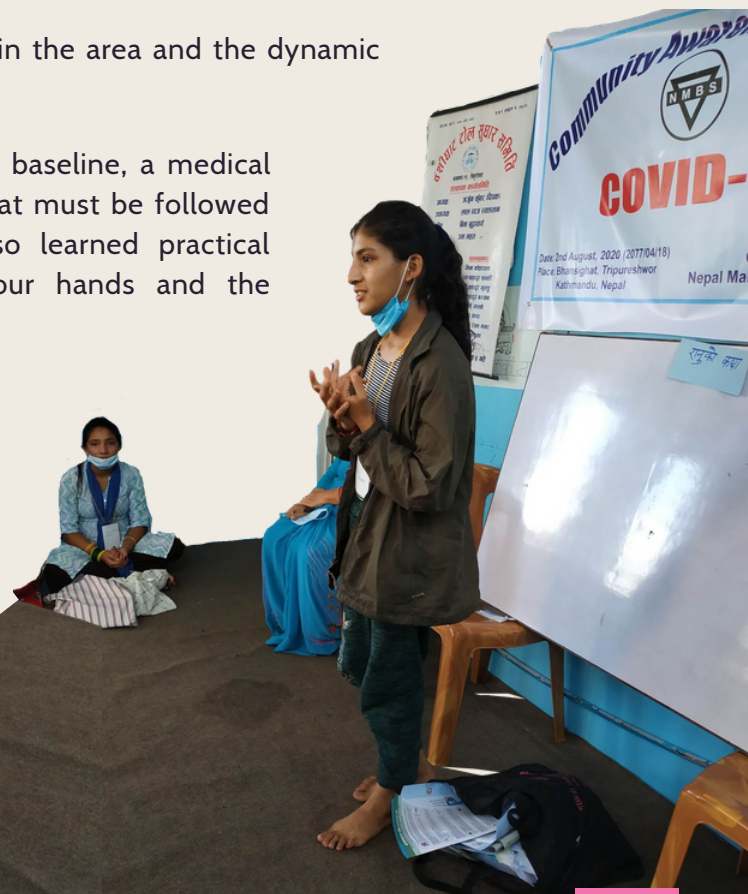
National General Secretary of YWCA Nepal Draupadi Rokaya, welcoming girls to the YWCA safe space conducted in Kathmandu

The session brought together 30 young women living in the area and the dynamic intergenerational team at YWCA Nepal.

Using the World Health Organization's guidelines as a baseline, a medical facilitator explained the health and safety measures that must be followed to avoid infection and put others at risk. They also learned practical information, including the correct way to wash your hands and the appropriate use of facemasks and sanitizer.

In the session, myths about the virus were addressed. Young women were also able to reflect on the many other issues affecting them, such as mental health disorders, trust issues, anxiety, lack of information, and financial crisis.

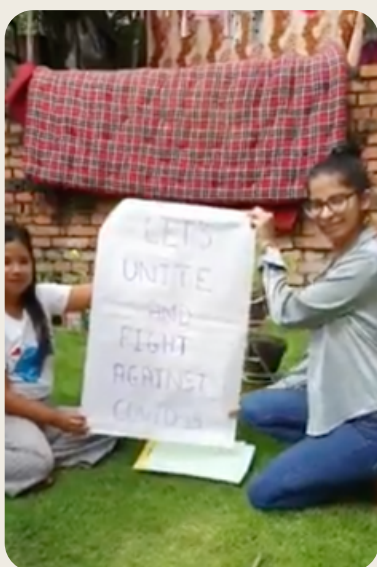
Young woman sharing during YWCA Nepal safe space



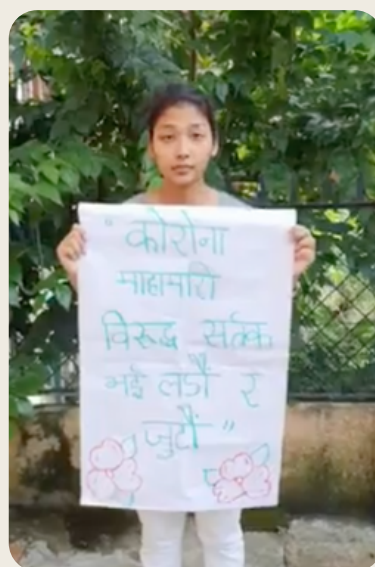
YWCA Nepal provided counseling to the young women using storytelling as a powerful tool for them to reflect on their resilience and strength while nurturing confidence in a supportive environment. Energised by the session, they felt better equipped to cope with the pandemic and decided to play an active role in its response. As shared by one young woman, Amisha:

“I WILL PLAY THE ROLE OF CATALYST TO SPREAD THE RIGHT INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 WITH DEBUNKING THE MYTHS ASSOCIATED WITH THIS”.

The YWCA also used digital platforms to create awareness and involve more communities. A video to promote uniting in the fight against COVID-19 was released in English and Nepali on the YWCA's social media channels.



[CLICK HERE TO VIEW VIDEO IN ENGLISH](#)



[CLICK HERE TO VIEW VIDEO IN ENGLISH](#)



To complement the intervention, YWCA Nepal prepared and distributed commodities packages with hand sanitizer, masks, and soaps to the young women and 210 unreached households in the slum area of Bansighat.

Although the focus during COVID-19 has been initially more on physical health, YWCA Nepal remains committed to creating safe spaces and supporting young women and girls to mitigate the pandemic's impacts on them, including adverse effects on their mental wellbeing.





# Addressing structural barriers to fight COVID-19 in Nigeria

Project implemented by YWCA Nigeria



Mainland and Ikeja Local Government Areas, Lagos State, Nigeria



Address barriers and needs of women and girls in Mainland and Ikeja Local Government Areas, where COVID-19 cases were reported to be the highest.

## Background

Measures to address the escalating COVID-19 crisis in Nigeria included the enforcement of movement restrictions in Lagos State, one of the regions with the highest incidence of cases in the country. By the time YWCA Nigeria did its first community outreach in response to the pandemic's impacts on women and girls, Lagos still topped the list of the affected states in the country with 35% of total cases.

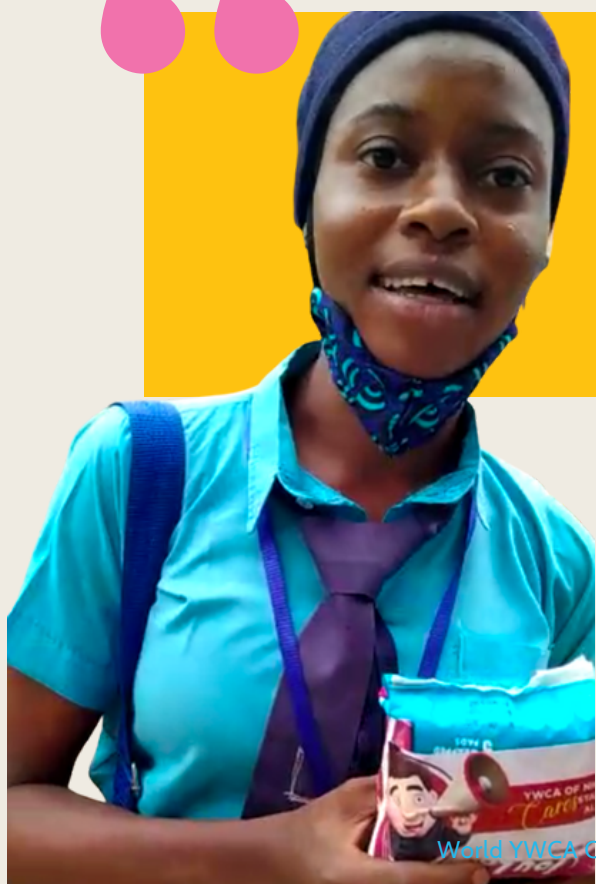
Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has profound gender implications that have led to increased inequalities for women and girls in Nigeria. While government-imposed restrictions on citizens' physical movement are necessary, they increased women's household care burden, heightening their overall vulnerability to the pandemic.

This context was reflected in women traders in local markets in the Mainland and Ikeja area who struggled to make enough money when market days were reduced from six days a week to three due to partial lockdown. In such conditions, many women and young women would prioritise food over other essential needs such as menstrual hygiene products and basic protection and sanitary equipment to avoid infection.

## Intervention

To bridge the existing gender disparity gap, YWCA Nigeria ensured accurate and relevant COVID-19 information for women and girls and provided personal protection equipment including masks and sanitisers. The YWCA also distributed food provisions following COVID-19 protocol for public engagement, along with awareness and preventive guidelines that were made available in local languages.

The YWCA believes that a pandemic should not prevent women and girls from managing their menstruation safely, hygienically, and with dignity. Besides sharing critical information on COVID-19, the YWCA dedicated efforts to promote menstrual hygiene practices in public schools in poor communities and respond to adolescent girls' immediate needs by providing them with sanitary pads. This outreach contributed to relieve stress from the lack of adequate access to menstrual hygiene products, often due to economic circumstances. The YWCA additionally reached a support group for young women living with HIV and a special home for girls living with disabilities to ensure that they too had access to the products they need to manage their cycle.



“THANK YOU VERY MUCH TO THE YOUNG WOMEN CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA. MAY GOD BLESS THEM ABUNDANTLY ”.



As a result of this intervention and the partnerships that grew during the different outreaches, over 470 women and girls received essential items and material to cope with the pandemic with more resilience. This project also reinforced the importance of understanding the structural barriers underlying this emergency, which is not only causing but exacerbating serious violations of women and girls' human rights.



# Leaving no one behind in rural communities in Togo

Project implemented by YWCA Togo



Localities of Massouhoin, Kpomé and Agomé, located in the Plateaux and Maritime regions of Togo.



Reaching out to aid vulnerable rural women, young women, and girls in localities of Massouhoin, Kpomé, and Agomé.

## Background

The COVID-19 crisis has had severe repercussions for women and young girls from Massouhoin, Kpomé, and Agomé localities in Togo. On account of harmful gendered roles that view unpaid care work as a female prerogative, women typically spend more time on household responsibilities and caring for their families than men. Additionally, many women in these localities work in agriculture, often in the informal sector, giving them no access to social security and making it harder to provide for their families. These conditions created a “double burden” of work for women, putting them in a challenging position to cope with confinement and other safety restrictions.

Another big concern in these localities was the circulation of false COVID-19 information that would undermine the pandemic's severity by even denying the virus' existence. People needed reliable knowledge to avoid infection, especially in remote areas where accurate data would not reach the population and would be substituted by myths and rumors that triggered fear and inadequate prevention solutions.

For vulnerable groups in Togo, it was hard to cope and understand the reasons behind the authorities' decisions to close towns, borders, block activities and declare lockdown and confinement to curb the spread of the virus. Although these restrictions were critical to respond to the COVID-19 emergency, it also meant an unequal and disproportional effect on the economic, physical, and mental wellbeing of poor women and girls in rural communities.

## Intervention

In response, YWCA Togo joined other associations and civil society organisations to inform state authorities on the local situation and support the establishment of a recovery program for women and girls in rural poor communities. The program aimed to make rural livelihoods more resilient in the context of the crisis, by allowing populations to have timely access to information and basic vital needs.



Demonstration of the proper way of hand-washing using soap and ash



Demonstration of the correct wearing of face-masks

In open and wide spaces and applying all safety protocols, the YWCA lead interactive awareness sessions on the virus and its manifestations, symptoms, barrier measures, and the correct wearing of masks. During the sessions, YWCA members also demonstrated the proper way of hand-washing using soap and ash. This last considering the [World Health Organisations' advice to use ash or sand as a substitute for soap whenever it may be in short supply during emergencies.](#)

The YWCA organized and distributed food baskets that contained rice, corn, cassava flour, and oil, for women and girls facing food shortages. Additionally, the YWCA provided reusable face masks and soap, ensuring to also give enough for elders that could not come to the gathering spot, but were represented by their children.

While implementing the distribution in each locality, the energy and topics shared caught the attention of many spectators including food vendors present in the gathering place, curious children, and other community members such as the local chiefs. They were all welcomed to join the conversation and YWCA Togo made sure that everyone who joined received a kit with COVID-19 protection material.

The Chief of the town of Agomé emphasized the importance of prevention in rural communities where people live closely together and where social distancing measures can be challenging:

“IT IS VERY VITAL TO PREVENT BECAUSE IF A CASE ENTERS THE LOCALITY, THE WHOLE VILLAGE WOULD ALREADY BE CONTAMINATED BEFORE IT IS DETECTED.”

As an unexpected outcome, the YWCA was able to increase the number of beneficiaries in the intervention, and other critical community members took part in the initiative to promote safety and vital health measures to prevent and defeat COVID-19 in their locality.







# Promoting gender equality and sustainable development in Mbare

Project implemented by YWCA Zimbabwe



Hopley, Epworth and Mbare  
in Harare, Zimbabwe



Promoting equality and providing opportunities for sustainable development for vulnerable young women and girls from Hopley, Epworth, and Mbare.

## Background

The existing macro-economic challenges in Zimbabwe, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, aggravated women and girls' vulnerability in poor communities. During the pandemic, strict confinement presented significant constraints in a mostly informal economy where people lack benefits such as health care, social insurance, and paid leave. For instance, informal traders in Mbare area need to work daily to earn a living. A lockdown became a significant risk on their livelihoods, especially for women and girls. Additionally, healthcare delivery, clean water, and sanitation became limited in Zimbabwe, forcing millions to face challenges accessing these vital services.

## Intervention

Committed to women and girls' leadership since 1957, YWCA of Zimbabwe targeted a crisis response project in low-income communities in Hopley, Epworth, and Mbare, where informal trading and vending are common. The communities also have large family sizes, low education levels, and lack stable incomes.

To respond to the immediate needs of vulnerable women, young women and girls in the areas, the YWCA provided essential food and hygiene items and dignity kits that contained reusable sanitary pads and panties to manage their periods sustainably. This included pertinent information on women and girls' sexual reproductive rights that could support them to make informed decisions on their health and future.



YWCA Zimbabwe sharing good practices for using and washing reusable sanitary pads and panties.

At least 50 women and girls received food kits with basic commodities such as mealie-meal, soap, rice, sugar, cooking oil, flour, soya chunks, and face masks for protection. During the distribution, the YWCA also took the opportunity to share more about the movement's values and mission to address gender-based violence and sexual reproductive health and rights issues.

YWCA Zimbabwe distributed dignity kits that contained reusable sanitary pads and panties to promote sustainable period management,



The pressing need to provide for their families clubbed with the lack of understanding of why prevention mechanisms were necessary for the community's wellbeing would push people to disregard safety measures or wear a mask only to avoid the police. To mitigate this gap, the YWCA shared awareness and health information on COVID-19 in every intervention. YWCA Zimbabwe also recognised this situation as a unique opportunity to scale up business ventures that could support women and young women in increasing household income and promoting health measures to avoid the spread of COVID-19. For this reason, as a second phase of the project and with the support of YWCA Zimbabwe's branch in Mbare, the YWCA's Vocational Training school was used as an accessible venue to facilitate workshops for women and young women to learn how to produce facemask and sanitizer for themselves and selling. The school's strategic location near the Central Business District made this place an accessible meeting point for people in Harare and those from Epworth and Hopley to join.



Learning how to make facemasks



Branded bottles of sanitiser for selling

As a result, young women and girls learned how to produce sanitiser and facemasks, acquire marketing skills to boost their income, and felt more encouraged to pursue their own business initiative. Each participant went home with more than 50 facemasks, 5 liters of sanitiser, and 100 ml branded bottles for selling.

An additional group was also trained in making reusable sanitary pads to explore other potential markets and strengthen efforts to promote a sustainable, safe and hygienic menstrual experience for women and girls.

YWCA Zimbabwe facilitated workshops to learn how to produce sanitiser



Furthermore, YWCA partnered with Agri Bank, a leading provider of financial services for agriculture development in Zimbabwe, to educate young women in financial literacy. In this initiative, the project introduced a piggy bank concept motivating women and young women to save their earnings after selling the sanitisers and facemask and keep them in a sealed tin to be opened only when they were prepared to kick-start another project or business idea.



Women, young women, and girls were able to build resilience and coping mechanisms amidst COVID-19, and explore new income-generating opportunities

YWCA Zimbabwe acknowledges that there is still a lot of work to be done, however, the overall project served to build resilience and coping mechanisms for vulnerable women, young women, and girls during COVID-19 and support them in taking up better economic opportunities and leading healthier and more dignified lives.





# YWCA Home: Secured, Attainable, Faith-Based, and Educational (S.A.F.E.)

Project implemented by YWCA The Philippines



Online and YWCA The Philippines headquarters in Manila



Providing virtual safe spaces for spiritual, physical, and mental well-being for out-of-school young women and girls aged 15-30 years old, women from an ethnic or linguistic minority, rural women and survivors of violence.

## Background

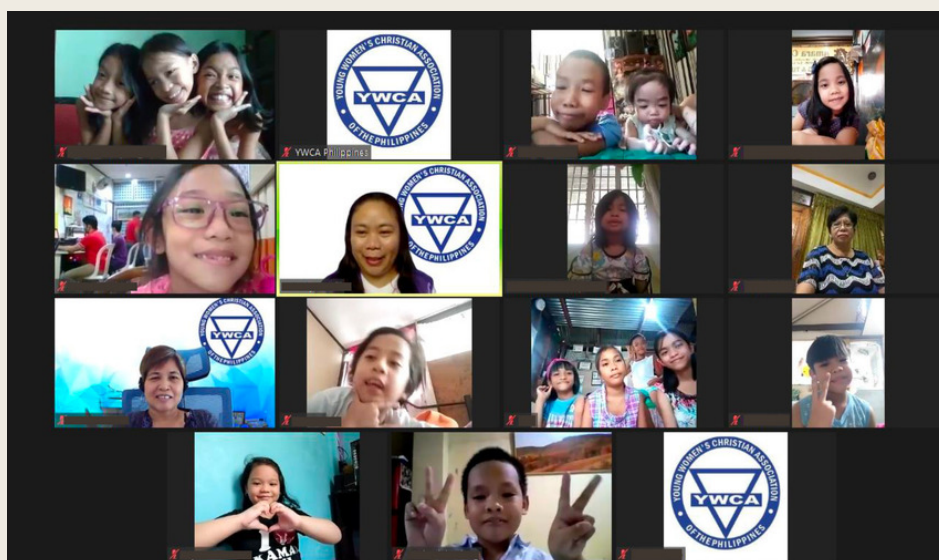
Women and girls in the Philippines have been in a vulnerable position since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre-existing conditions such as significant social and gender inequalities have exacerbated the crisis's impact on the countries' population, especially for women, young women, and girls.

Shortly after the virus reached the Philippines's territory, the infection rate increased alarmingly, making it the second country in Southeast Asia with the most cases of COVID-19. The emergency of this situation triggered the government to impose strict lockdown measures to prevent the spread. However, these measures took a significant toll on Filipino livelihoods and unleashed distressing challenges in the country's economy with millions of people losing their jobs.

With a prolonged lockdown, women and girls in the Philippines were spending more time at home, facing isolation and barriers such as financial constraints, restrictions to services, and the brunt of housework, including caregiving for children, the ill, and the elderly. The crisis had clear consequences to their mental health and overall well-being, mainly for women and girls who face multiple intersecting forms of discrimination and violence.

## Intervention

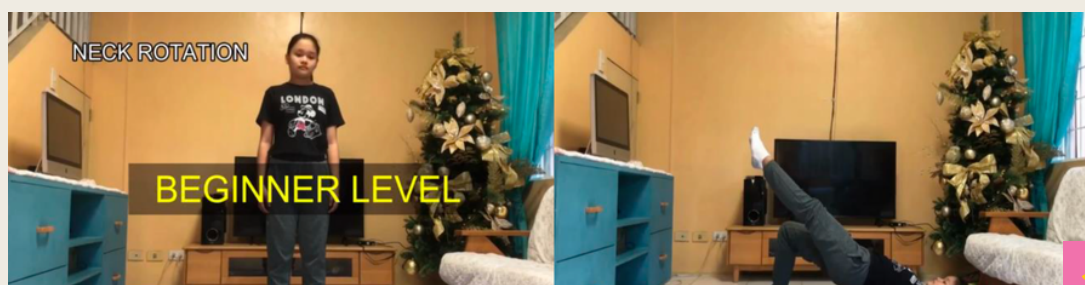
To break the stigma attached to mental health and create a sense of community where everyone felt welcome, safe, and free to share ideas and address pressing concerns, YWCA of The Philippines launched a programme called: YWCA Home: Secured. Attainable. Faith-Based and Educational (SAFE). Using Zoom and Facebook Live as the main channels of reach, the YWCA led diverse thematic virtual sessions and activities to engage individuals, families, and communities living in critical circumstances due to the pandemic.



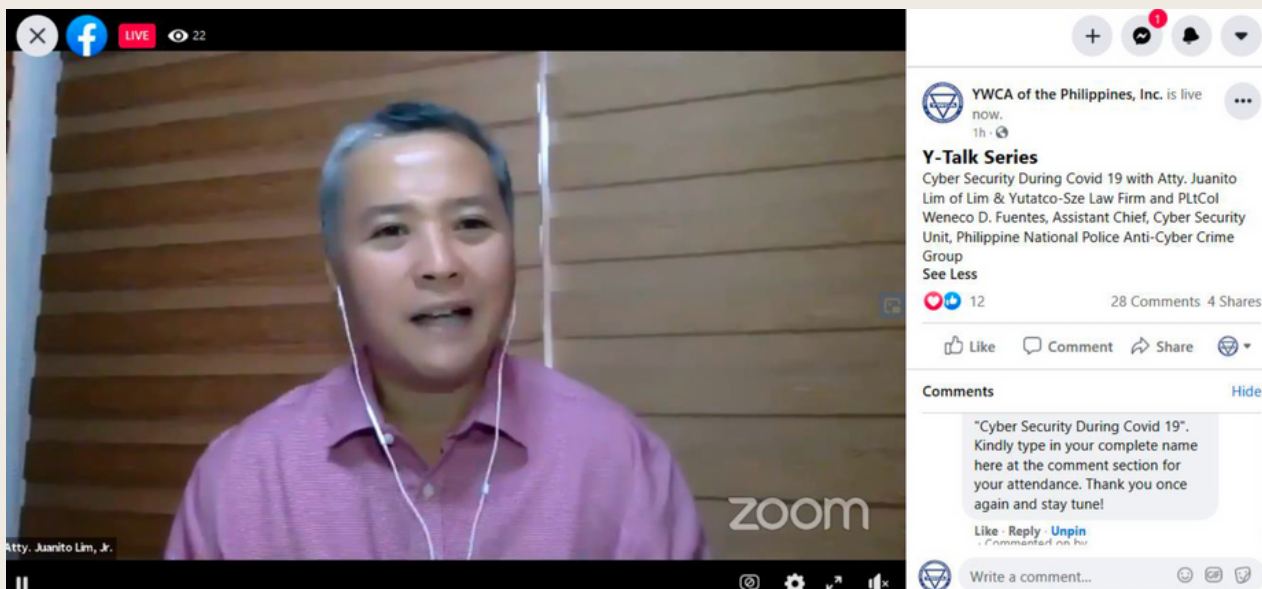
YWCA The Philippines led spiritual guidance and bible classes for children spending more time at home with schools closed.

The YWCA programme offered spiritual guidance and bible classes for teenagers and children, spending more time at home with schools closed. "Y Talks," a series of creative online conversations to learn and increase awareness on mental health issues and different forms of gender-based violence, gave young women and girls a platform to share and reflect on the unique challenges faced during COVID-19. Zoom sessions with poetry and singing complemented to boost mental and emotional wellbeing. Other sessions provided tips for nutrition, and pre-recorded physical fitness activities for women of all ages helped encourage physical health.

Pre-recorded physical fitness activities for women of all ages

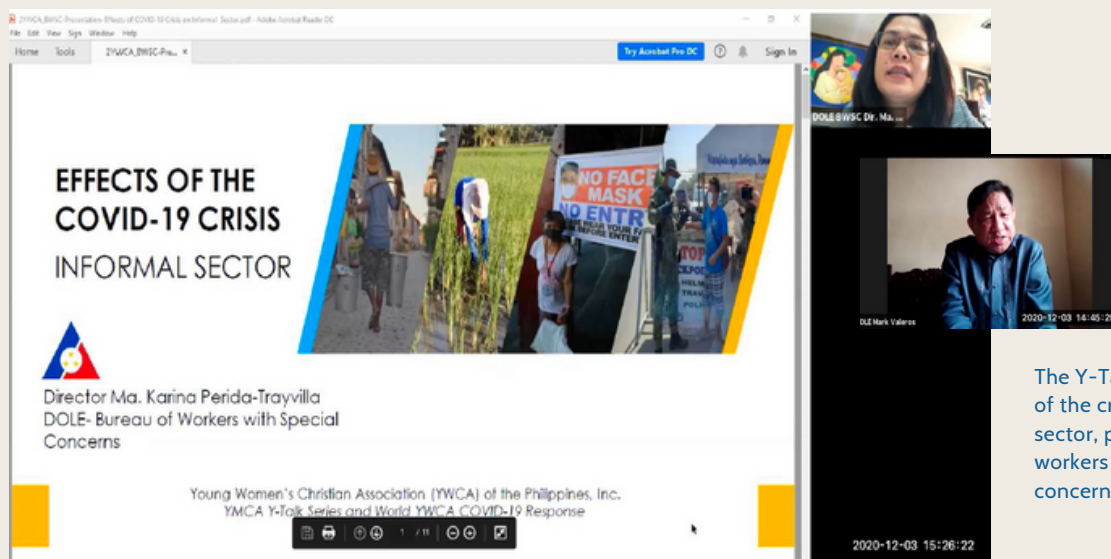


"Lawyer Talks" on Facebook Live featured experts providing knowledge on protection systems and laws related to the rising challenges due to the pandemic, such as increased cyber violence. These online events also shared critical information on labour laws and community-based or short-term wage employment assistance and programmes around the country to ease economic difficulties.



Y-Talk Series on cybersecurity during COVID-19 via Facebook Live. A key outcome during the course of the project was the active involvement of men supporting the cause and activities led by women and young women.

Each event was carefully monitored and evaluated, and by the third month of planned virtual activities the programme reached eighteen thousand seven hundred sixty-seven (18,767) people, mostly women and young women from different regions in the Philippines.



The Y-Talk Series on the effects of the crisis on the informal sector, provided a space for workers to address their concerns.

A key outcome during the course of the project was an active involvement and engagement of young men and men of various partner institutions and organizations. It was powerful to have men supporting the cause and activities led by women, as it challenged gendered discriminatory beliefs in the Philippines that prevent women from taking more leadership roles. The project also paved the way for creating equal opportunities and virtual safe spaces where both women and men can help achieve a common purpose in the community regardless of the situation.

Despite the challenges for access to mental health care and services in the country, the YWCA has continue creating safe spaces for vulnerable women and young women in need of free counselling and consultation, and enabling an environment where their voices are heard without judgment or bias.

Session on the impacts of COVID-19 regarding gender-based violence

**Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**

- Unintended/unwanted pregnancies
- Lack of access to contraceptives; mobility restrictions
- Too poor to buy contraceptives
- High gender-based violence
- Joblessness and poverty
- An estimated 26% (almost 1:3) increase of 2020 maternal deaths due to the pandemic's disruption of access to health services
- Lack of access to emergency contraceptives
- Maternal death from unsafe abortion complications due to lack of access to safe abortion

**Ms. Marie Franz A. Gavino**  
Registered Psychologist  
HealSpace Psychological Clinic

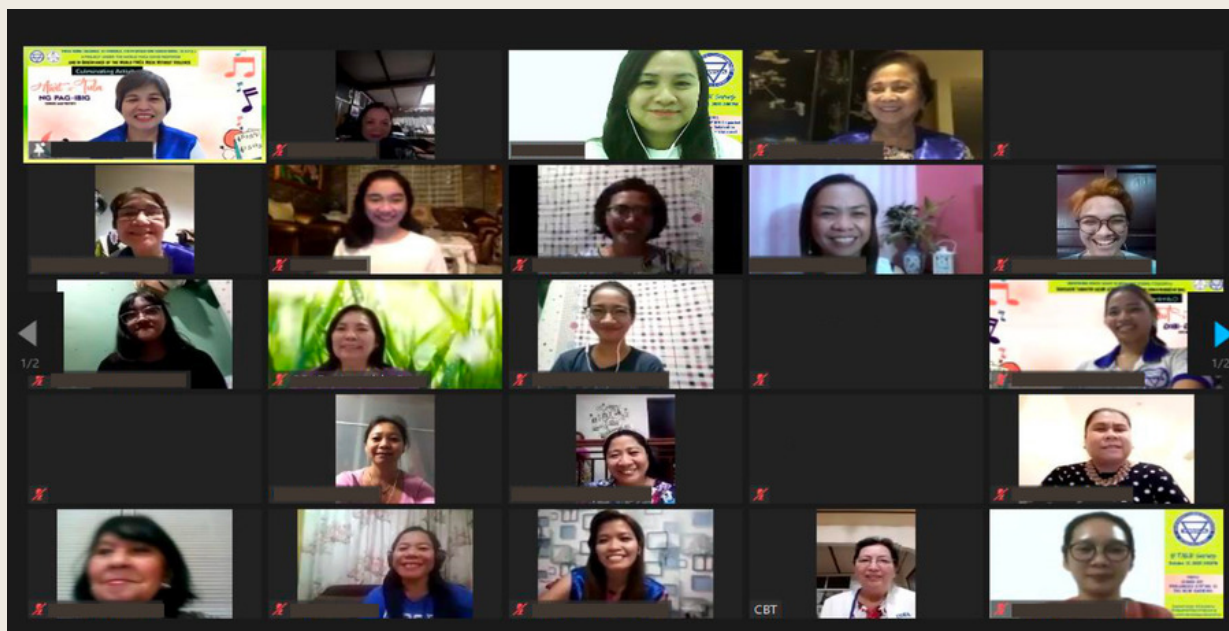
Managing Anxiety and Taking Care of Our Mental Health During Pandemic  
#IfGoesFurB

YWCA HOME: SECURED, ATTAINABLE, FAITH-BASED AND EDUCATIONAL (S.A.F.E.)  
A PROJECT UNDER THE WORLD YWCA COVID RESPONSE FUND

In Partnership with:  
HealSpace Psychological Clinic  
Amara

Y-Talk Series on taking care of mental health during the pandemic

As part of the intervention, the National YWCA Headquarters in Manila opened its doors for women and young women that required immediate support and a physical temporary safe space.



Session in Zoom led by YWCA The Philippines gave a virtual safe space for communities living in critical circumstances due to COVID-19

The YWCA will continue its commitment to serve communities in need and deliver programs and services to support women, young women and girls thrive and lead change.





# Communicating life-saving information in the village of Kinzono

Project implemented by YWCA DRC



Kinzono Village, Tshangu District, DRC



Equip vulnerable young women and girls from the village of Kinzono, DRC with life-saving communication on COVID-19.

## Background

One essential lifesaving action in public health emergencies such as the on-going COVID-19 pandemic is providing communities with timely and adequate communication on how to protect themselves and others. In big countries with dense populations, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the absence of reliable information in remote communities has made people skeptical of the pandemic threats, believing the virus is just a rumour rather than a reality.

After four months of lockdown, DRC slowly started resuming back social and economic activities and lifting confinement measures with the assumption that the population would comply with preventive and protective health protocols. However, the evident communication gap and lack of access to critical information on COVID-19 in remote areas, and the growing disbelief on the virus, increased infection vulnerability with people crowding places, not wearing masks and disregarding social distancing.

## Intervention

As part of a movement with deep roots in communities, YWCA of DRC targeted the village of Kinzono in the Maluku commune, Tshangu District of DRC; a village that does not have the hospital infrastructure capable of containing the spread of the coronavirus and carrying out the administration of quality care for the sick. By engaging volunteers and community members, the YWCA mobilised resources and awareness sessions to equip villagers with lifesaving knowledge and better prepare them to respond to the pandemic.



YWCA DRC led sessions to disseminate vital information on COVID-19

The sessions were conducted in local languages, and brought together different community members to ensure a social, behavioral change in hygiene practices, social distancing, and to dispel misinformation. In small groups, people were encouraged to wash hands frequently, wear masks in public places, avoid crowded places and meeting people with colds and coughs, observe physical distance, and stay home as much as possible to promote health recommendations and prevention guidelines. These spaces were also used to create awareness on gender-based violence, considering that home may not be a safe place for women and girls experiencing domestic violence. In addition, the YWCA provided distributed masks and soap around in Kinzono, and installed three public handwashing basins at the district office market, at a local peasant's association where awareness sessions were conducted, and in a community hospital.

As a critical outcome at least 40% of the village population received vital information and expanded their knowledge on COVID-19. According to feedback compiled by the YWCA, the awareness sessions had been highly anticipated and allowed them to have reliable information and learn how to protect themselves, their loved ones and the broader community



# Acknowledgements

The World YWCA would like to express deep gratitude to the many individuals and organisations contributing to the YWCA crisis response fund:

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Your donations have supported and equipped YWCAs to better respond to the pressing needs in communities and help transform the lives of hundreds of women, young women, and girls affected by the pandemic.

We also take this opportunity to acknowledge YWCA member associations working in the heart of communities worldwide. Their leadership and unwavering commitment have provided an agile response to support women, young women, and girls in need during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

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