

IUSSP Webinar

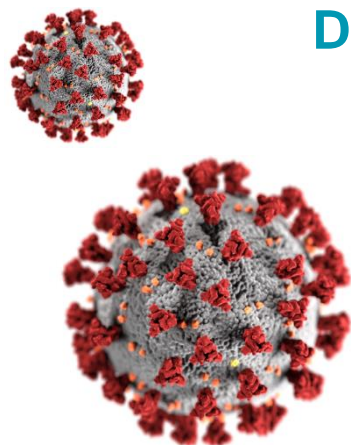
# The COVID-19 Pandemic and Sexual & Reproductive Health in Africa

**Day 2: SRH Rights, Unintended Pregnancy & Schooling, Gender-Based  
Violence & Disability**

**Discussant**

Kola Oyediran, Senior M&E Advisor | JSI, Arlington, VA, USA

*1 September 2020 | 15:00–16:30 UTC*



# Background

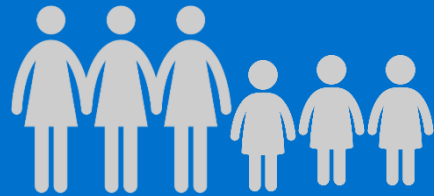


- There are several potential sources of stress in the current context of COVID-19 pandemic that could impact:
  - Sexual & reproductive health rights
  - Gender-based violence
  - Well being of disable people
  - Schooling and unintended pregnancy
  - Access to services considered not essential to the prevention & control of the pandemic
- Reducing COVID-19 transmission and suppression requires **significant changes of personal & community attitudes and behaviour.**
- Needed changes would have consequences in access to services and can be detrimental to mental health.
  - e.g. key interventions for reducing spread of COVID-19 are social distancing, isolation, or quarantine for those infected & their contacts, and government imposed lockdown or curfews

## Topic 1

# Realities of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Sexual, and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Issues

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**Women & girls are often affected the hardest.**

- SRH behaviour does not stop during emergencies situations – it may **increase** particularly with restrictive measures (lockdown, isolation, curfew, etc.).
- Cursory evidences have emerged that COVID-19 has impeded access to SRH services.
  - e.g. additional delays in caring for pregnant women, resulting in adverse outcomes. Spontaneous abortions and haemorrhage has been attributed to COVID-19 in a number of settings.

## Topic 1

# Realities of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Sexual, and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) Issues

- Emerging data suggests disruption of access to SRH information by women and girls due to measure to curtail the pandemic in several SSA countries.
  - **Coverage reduction:** due to workforce reductions; disruptions of supplies & commodities; access reductions; and demand reductions



## Topic 2

# Lockdowns and learning possibilities: *Reflections on unintended pregnancy and school*

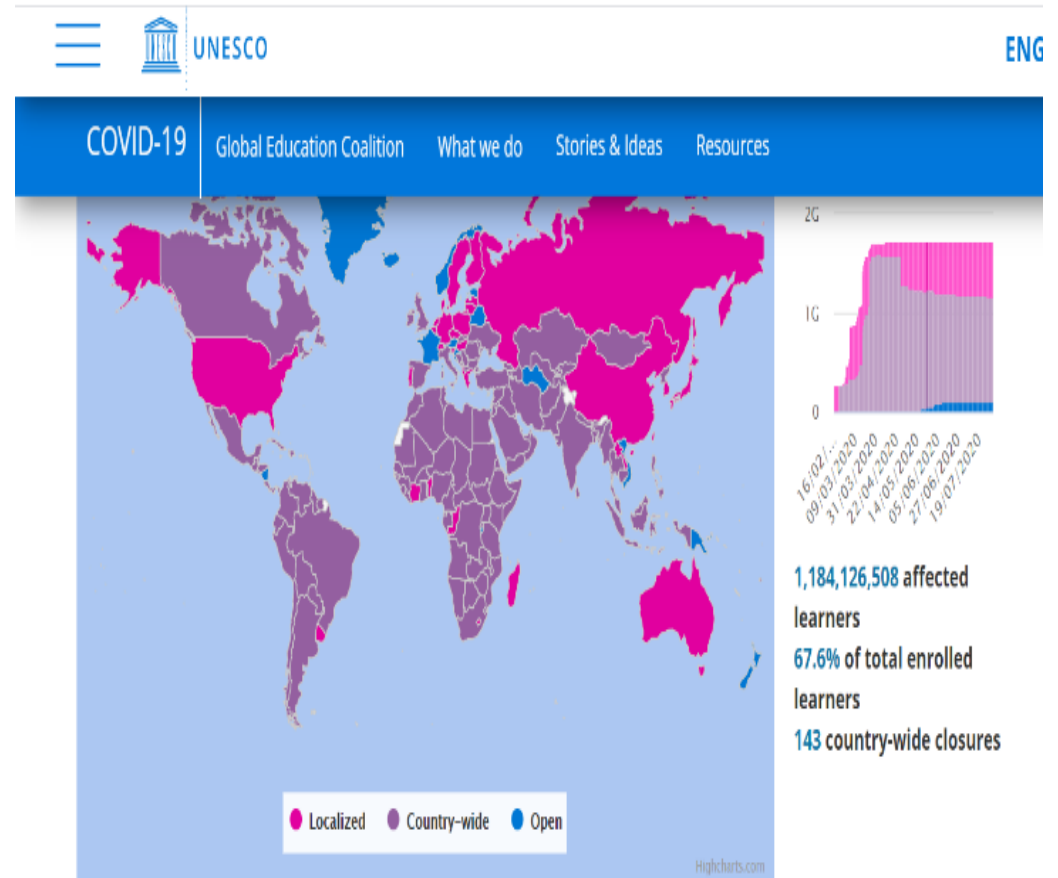
- Many African governments have implemented measures to prevent students from contracting COVID-19.
  - Key measure: closing schools and institutions of learning



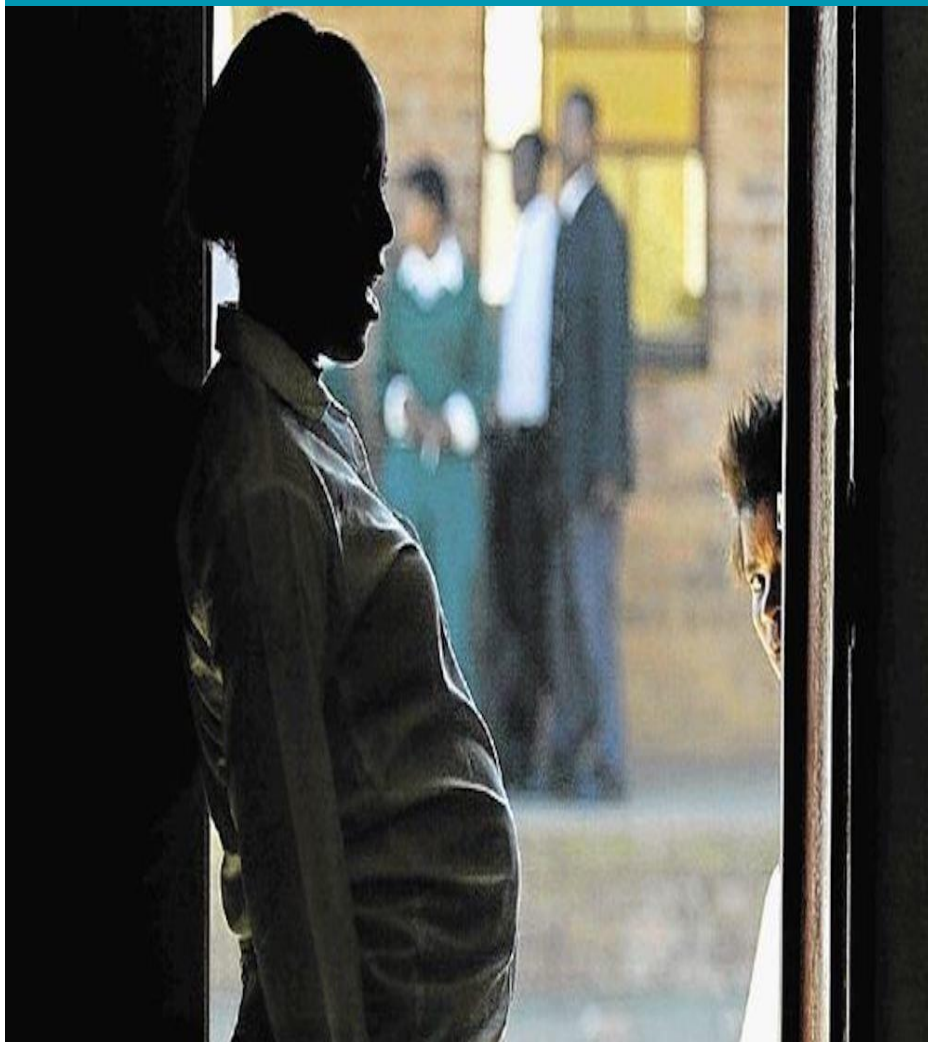
Photo by Uwezo Kenya

# Lockdowns and learning possibilities: *Reflections on unintended pregnancy and school*

- Poor infrastructure and lack of student access to supplies & equipment have caused virtual learning to not be effective for most students & families in sub-Saharan Africa.
  - e.g. Kenya government has cancelled 2020 school year completely because virtual learning not working



**Kate Maina-Vorley,**  
Plan International  
Kenya's Country  
Director



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"It is alarming that so many teenage girls have fallen pregnant during lockdown, which can have lifelong consequences for them."

## Lockdowns and learning possibilities: *Reflections on unintended pregnancy and school*

**The increase in teenage and unintended pregnancy attributed to lockdown and school closure is not unique to Kenya.**

- In Uganda, the Bullisa district's child and family protection unit reported that early pregnancy stands between **25-30%** since children are not in school.
- ***“They are loitering in the towns and at landing sites without any control.” -Officer***

- A district education officer in Nsanje district in Malawi was reported to have told a local radio station, Capital Radio, that more than **300** girls fell pregnant since schools closed about four months ago.



# COVID-19 pandemic and Gender-Based Violence in Africa



Photo: DFID/CC BY 2.0

- Globally, women including those in Africa are demonstrating their leadership in responding to COVID-19, particularly as frontline health care workers.
- Yet, data shows women are **more vulnerable to the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic**, exacerbated domestic violence, loss of jobs and livelihoods.
- Evidence has emerged regarding increase in the number of reported cases of IPV in stable relationship that may be due to the restrictive measures and lockdown to slow COVID-19.

# COVID-19 pandemic and Gender-Based Violence in Africa

**Restrictive measures and lockdowns are contributing to high levels of stress & anxiety, disruption in social networks, and insecurity & financial strains.**



- UN data showed a spike in GBV violence in Nigeria. The report showed the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team reported a **three-fold increase** in the number of telephone calls received through their hotlines in one month.<sup>1</sup>
- UN data on GBV cases in Nigeria from 24 States showed GBV incidents were **346** in March 2020 and spiked to **794** in the first part of April, 2020, a **56% increase** in just two weeks of lockdown.<sup>2</sup>
- Some of the incidents of violence have tragically ended in the death of victims, rape, and tenant-landlord assault.
- The data showed that women subjected to gender-based violence by their **intimate partners jumped 53% in Mali** in April 2020 (484) compared to the same period in 2019 (317).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UN Women, 2020, "Violence against Women and Girls: The Shadow Pandemic", <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>

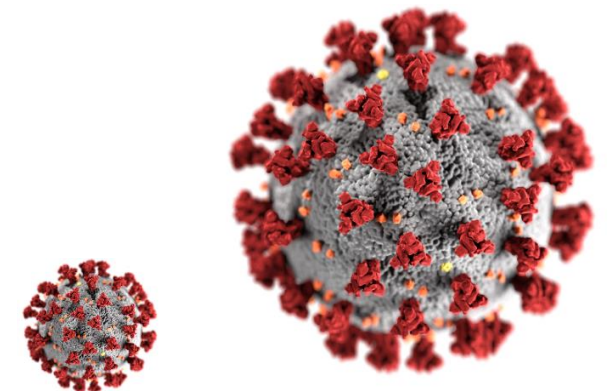
<sup>2</sup> UN Women, 2020, "Violence against Women and Girls: The Shadow Pandemic", <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>

<sup>3</sup> <https://wcaro.unfpa.org/en/news/impact-covid-19-gender-based-violence-west-and-central-africa>

## Topic 4

# COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown, restrictions and disability in Africa

- COVID-19 has **compounded the suffering of people with disabilities** who under normal circumstances are less likely to access health care, education, employment and more likely to live in poverty and experience violence.
- Access to preventive and care measures became perilous due to COVID-19:
  - Accessible public health information will be limited
  - Barriers to implement basic hygiene measures and inaccessible health facilities
- Emerging data suggests that people with disabilities face harder and tougher situations with COVID-19 pandemic.





**Bankole Labody Oyou was born blind and a 24-year-old student in Freetown, Sierra Leone**

Source: Kingsley Ighobor, Africa Renewal, May 2020

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“We are suffering,” he told Africa Renewal. “Some [disabled people] have no family members to care for them. We are told to stay indoors, but we have no food to eat. Subconsciously, the government and the community forget that we exist. I have not heard anyone discuss our plight on the radio.”



**Anne Wafula-Strike**  
**Kenyan**  
**Paralympian**

Source: Kingsley Ighobor,  
Africa Renewal, May 2020  
Image: Annestrike.org

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“People with disabilities are relegated to the background. The pandemic simply worsened an already bad situation.” **Anne Wafula-Strike** continued, “They are not consulted before COVID-19 messages are conceptualized, and the channels of dissemination are not accessible to them,” she says. “Many don’t own radio or television sets; some of them are visually impaired and can’t read or write.”

# Conclusion

- COVID-19 poses a great threat to the attainment of SDG-3 “good health and well-being.”
- So, as sub-Saharan Africa countries continue to grapple with COVID-19, social scientists and reproductive health experts are needed to improve research to provide answers to SRH questions that will arise from the effect of the current pandemic.



- **Evaluation work** to examine pre-COVID-19 and COVID-19 to know the extent of impact of COVID-19 on SRHR, unintended pregnancy, gender-based violence, human capital development index
- **Studies** that apply several cross-disciplinary methodologies to generate needed data, including mixed-methods.
- **Qualitative & quantitative studies** to understand the choices couples and women make regarding their SRH (including decisions around getting pregnant, not using contraceptives, place of delivery, etc.) during and after COVID-19.
- **COVID-19 and male SRH**