

THE RESPONSE



Photo: UN Women/Fabrice Gentile

Editorial

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FEEDBACK

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Editorial



Welcome to The Response Editors note

Covid-19 hit and the world came to a stand-still. Borders closed, schools closed and remote working became our new day to day, home offices were no longer a luxury for some but a necessity for most.

I remember the day nearly every news channel globally began reporting on Covid-19 and how whispers in between small talk during our coffee break from class had then become a reality we were to face. It did not take long, from those whispers to become the dark cloud that shrouds over the whole world... We were finally united by the pandemic; or so we thought.

If there is something bittersweet that has been highlighted by this pandemic are the inequalities that still exist in our societies which many African countries often choose to overlook. These gaps have been widened and have become evident for all to see.

From the gross underfunding of key Ministries addressing Women and Girl's issues to increasing rates of violence in its many forms since the onset of Covid-19; this pandemic has shone a giant spotlight on exactly how much of a neo-liberalist and patriarchal system many African countries operate under; and most of all, how little is said and documented on women's experiences under these systems. This is why I am so excited to see '**The Response**' come to life.

The Response, comes as a campaign driven by the urgent need to ensure that women and girls are not left behind in the pandemic response and recovery i.e. their voices are heard and needs prioritized. Written by young feminist thought leaders, emerging writers, and gender equality activists analyzing emerging global issues, **The Response** will be a platform to celebrate feminist writers and spotlight women's lived experiences.

With that, I invite you to read, enjoy the art, share feedback and contribute your thoughts.

Sincerely,

Jessica

FORUM GÉNÉRATION ÉGALITÉ

PARIS 2021



Member of the Generation Equality Youth Task Force Shantel Marekera, UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, President of France Emmanuel Macron, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and President of the European Council Charles Michel participate in the opening ceremony of the Generation Equality Forum in Paris. **Photo: UN Women/Fabrice Gentile**

COVER STORY: Over 50,000 people joined the Generation Equality Forum held in Paris at the end of June 2021. Participants ranged from world leaders, philanthropists, feminist leaders, women's rights activists and the 'who is who' in gender equality. The highlight of the forum was the commitments made by governments, philanthropic organisations and private companies. Over 40 billion dollars worth of new commitments towards gender equality were made at the forum. In this issue, we dive deeper into funding for feminist and women's rights organisations and ask the question, "Will this huge investment bring us 40 billion steps closer to attaining gender parity?" More from page 10

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FOCUS

GENERATION EQUALITY

IN THIS EDITION, WE UNPACK EVERYTHING THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT THE GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM, LET'S DIVE IN!

LET'S TALK GENERATION EQUALITY

Editorial

GE IN NUMBERS

Illustration

OPINION: MALAWI FOR FEMINIST LEADERSHIP, FINALLY!

Jessica Mandanda

IN THE PRESS

UN Women

FEATURE: 40 BILLION STEPS CLOSER?

Willson Chivhanga

ADVOCACY NOTE: FIGHTING GENDER INEQUALITIES, AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

Evelyn Odhiambo

Let's talk Generation Equality



Pic: UNWomen/Fabrice Gentile

Generation Equality is a global campaign that is bringing together people of every gender, age, ethnicity, race, religion and country, to drive actions that will create the gender-equal world we all deserve.

Launched in 2020, to mark the 25th year commemoration of the Beijing Platform for Action, the campaign demands equal pay, equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, an end to sexual harassment and all forms of violence against women and girls, health-care services that respond to their needs, and their equal participation in political life and decision-making in all areas of life.

The Forum

To galvanise collective action, UN Women and the governments of Mexico and France, co-hosted the Generation Equality Forum. The first edition was held in Mexico in March 2021 and the second edition was in Paris, France from 30 June – 2 July 2021.

The forum brought together activists, governments, corporations and change makers from around the world to define and announce ambitious investments and policies. These diverse stakeholders have embarked on a 5-year journey to accelerate equality, leadership and opportunity for women and girls worldwide. This work will culminate in 2026 and is built around a Global Acceleration Plan - a global road map for gender equality that aims to fulfil the promise of the Beijing Platform for Action and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
(adapted from UN Women)



[LEARN MORE](#)

Generation Equality Forum concludes in Paris with Announcement of Revolutionary Commitments and Global Acceleration Plan to Advance Gender Equality by 2026

Format: News and Press Releases | Source: UN Women | Originally published: 2 Jul 2021

Paris, France, 2 July 2021 – The Generation Equality Forum Paris concluded today with the announcement of bold gender equality commitments and launch of a global 5-year action journey to accelerate gender equality by 2026. The Forum's bold, action-oriented agenda will be under-written by nearly USD 40 Billion of confirmed investments as well as ambitious policy and programme commitments from governments, philanthropy, civil society, youth organizations and the private sector. The monumental conclusion comes at a critical moment as the world assesses the disproportionate and negative impact that COVID-19 has had on women and girls. Gender equality advocates have pressed for gender-responsive stimulus and recovery plans to ensure that women and girls are not left behind as the world re-builds.

"The Generation Equality Forum marks a positive, historic shift in power and perspective. Together we have mobilized across different sectors of society, from south to north, to become a formidable force, ready to open a new chapter in gender equality," said Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women. "The Forum's ecosystem of partners – and the investments, commitments and energy they are bringing to confront the greatest barriers to gender equality – will ensure faster progress for the world's women and girls than we have seen before." UN Women will maintain a critical role driving the Forum's 5-year action journey, overseeing the implementation of commitments to ensure accountability and progress over the next five years.

Speaking to mark the close of the Forum for the Government of France, the host of the Paris Forum, Ambassador and Secretary General of the Generation Equality Forum Delphine O said, "After two years of collective work with Member States, civil society and philanthropic and private organizations, we succeeded in raising the largest amount of investment to advance gender equality and women's rights ever. By implementing a new way of tackling global issues through efficient multilateralism, the Generation Equality Forum reversed the priorities on the international agenda and made gender equality, for too long underestimated, a long-term issue for the international community, along with climate, education and health. France will continue to be at the forefront to accelerate gender equality progress."

The USD 40 Billion of investments confirmed at the Forum's close represent a major step-change in resourcing for women's and girls' rights. Lack of financing is widely understood to be a major reason for slow progress in advancing gender equality and in enacting the women's rights agenda of the milestone 1995 Beijing Conference. By the close of the Forum, governments and public sector institutions had committed to USD 21 Billion in gender equality investments, the private sector USD 13 Billion, and Philanthropy USD 4.5 Billion. UN entities, international and regional organizations committed an aggregate of USD 1.3 Billion. In addition to these bold investments, many organizations made strong policy and program commitments, including 440 civil society organizations and 94 youth-led organizations. Forum organizers expect that the approximately 1,000 commitment-makers confirmed to date will be joined by many others over the next five years.

In addition to the significant commitments unveiled at the opening ceremony, the final two days of the Forum saw the unveiling of a wide range of commitments from every sector, with examples including:

- The Government of Burkina Faso's work with Benin, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Togo to develop shared commitments related to family life education; free care for pregnant women and children under five years; and pursuing legal and social change to end gender-based violence, including FGM and child marriage
- The United States Government's commitment to a range of significant policies and investment requests including an investment of USD 1 Billion to support programmes to end violence against women, and USD 175 Million to prevent and respond to gender-based violence globally
- The expansion of the Global Alliance for Care, initiated by the Government of Mexico and UN Women. This now includes over 39 countries; for example, the Government of Canada's commitment of USD 100 Million to address inequalities in the care economy globally, as a parallel to significant investment in its own care system
- The Malala Fund's commitment to provide at least USD 20 Million in feminist funding to girls education activists
- P&G's commitment to advance women's economic justice and rights through its global value chain by spending USD 10 Billion with women-owned and women-led businesses through 2025
- The Government of Bangladesh's pledge to increase women's participation in the ICT sector, including the tech start-up and e-commerce sector, to 25 per cent by 2026 and 50 per cent by 2041.
- PayPal's commitment of USD 100 Million to advance women's economic empowerment
- Raise Your Voice Saint Lucia's commitment to collaborate with Caribbean NGOs to advocate for the recognition of the LGBTQI+ community and to undertake region-wide legislative reform to minimize discrimination and victimization
- Open Society Foundation's commitment of at least USD 100 million over five years to fund feminist political mobilization and leadership

The Forum in Paris, held 30 June – 2 July, engaged nearly 50,000 people in a mainly virtual format to generate action for the rapid advancement of gender justice. The convening launched a **Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality** designed by six Action Coalitions – multi-stakeholder partnerships that have identified the most critical actions required to achieve gender equality in areas from gender-based violence and technology to economic and climate justice. The Forum also launched a Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action, and announced new gender equality initiatives focused on health, sports, culture, and education.

Reflecting on the Forum, African Union Goodwill Ambassador on Ending Child Marriage Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, said, "This week, I relived the experience of 1995, when I was a young women's rights activist at the Beijing Conference. The COVID-19 context and other barriers are now an even greater inspiration for innovation, solidarity and inclusion. I am grateful for the commitments made this week. Now it's time to invest in girls and young women even more – for resources to reach rural and marginalized communities, for technology for public good and available to all, and for Member States' greater accountability to human rights of women and girls."

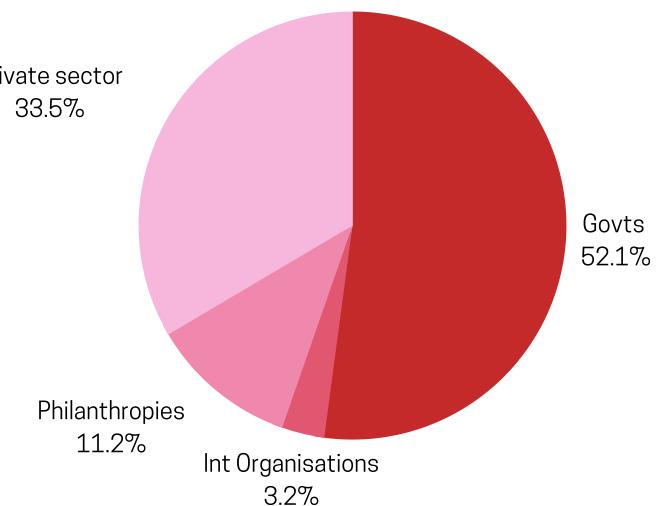
GE Commitments in Numbers

Commitments made



40 Billion

Contributions by Sector



50,000+

...the number of delegates who attended the Generation Equality Forum in Paris. Over 98% of these delegates joined online

1,000

...the total number of commitment makers

440

The number of civil society organisations that made policy & program commitments

94

The number of youth CSOs involved in the commitment making process

A large black circle containing a red dollar sign symbol, with a thick red outline around the entire shape.

40
BILLION



40 Billion steps closer ?

Will the 40 Billion new investment towards gender equality actually bring us closer to attaining gender equality or will it be just another statistic? In this article, Willson Chivhanga shares his excitement, hope and recommendations for action to ensure this investment translates into positive outcomes.

Willson Chivhanga

If you watched and/or participated in the Generation Equality Forum (GEF), you probably jumped with excitement as countries, philanthropists, foundations, organisations and corporates announced huge commitments towards gender equality (GE). Described as the ‘most significant international convening for gender equality since the 1995 Women’s Conference in Beijing’, the recently held Paris Forum lived up to expectations and saw the launch of the Global Acceleration Plan for gender equality and the announcement of over \$40billion worth of funding over the next five years.

This however, is not the first time huge commitments towards gender equality have been made. In 2014 alone, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) members provided USD 35.5 billion in aid towards gender equality, an all-time high then, and each year, the figure has been increasing.

In the same year , the OECD-DAC reports that, “Around 28% – nearly USD 10 billion of the 35.5 billion – went to civil society organisations (CSOs). The majority of this aid supported international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) or CSOs based in the donor country. 8% of gender focused aid to civil society went directly to CSOs in developing countries. Little was reported as going directly to women’s rights organisations.” Herein lies the problem - very little of GE financing is reaching women’s rights and feminist organisations in the global South who need it the most and are best positioned to utilise these resources in addressing the most pressing needs in their communities.

Research conducted by African Women in Development (AWID) shows that, 48% of women’s rights and feminist organizations from the Global South report their most recent fiscal year budget was less than \$30,000 USD a year; women’s rights organizations (WROs) receive only 0.13% of the total Official Development Assistance (ODA) and 0.4% of all gender-related aid; and Only 0.42% of foundation grants are allocated towards women's rights.

"very little of GE financing is reaching women's rights and feminist organisations in the global South who need it the most and are best positioned to utilise these resources in addressing the most pressing needs in their communities.."

The brief excitement I had as I listened to these huge commitments being made was quickly replaced by the sober realisation that, without radical and bold changes to the funding models and ecosystem, this \$40 billion will again be a statistic without any or much impact. The bulk of this money will once again be used to finance the overhead costs of international organisations based in donor countries which are so disconnected from the lived realities of the billions of women in the global South they claim to represent. Once again, very little of this money will actually reach and improve the lives of the millions of women and girls in the global south who need it the most.

Here are some ways donors and funders can change their models to ensure that this huge investment actually brings us closer to attaining gender equality.

Increase direct, long-term funding to women's rights and feminist organisations

Where resources have been reaching women's rights organisations, they have been typically small-scale and short-term. As OECD rightly alludes to, "Small amounts of money can stimulate learning and innovation, but they do not enable vital expansion, scale-up and strengthening of organisational and operational capacity". Local WROs and feminist organisations are best placed to drive lasting change – they have the knowhow and expertise, local connections and added incentive to see things change.

Their potential to do this is limited by funding constraints. Bridging this funding gap through more direct and long term funding will create pathways for organisational capacity and systems strengthening, thereby positioning them to deliver change that lasts. "Investing in the infrastructure of organisations and movements is the basics of sustainability, resilience and long-term change. This requires a long-term view of partnership that builds organisational capacity through multi-year core support".

Remove unnecessary barriers to funding

Funding WROs and FOs directly also means removing the traditional barriers that have oftentimes stood in the way of them accessing this funding. This includes, making eligibility requirements more flexible to accommodate small and young organisations; creating a mix of funding streams and mechanisms that allow partnerships with CSOs of different sizes and capabilities; and intentionally looking out for 'unusual suspects' – young, innovative groups and organisations which are diverse and are doing things differently.

"Investing in the infrastructure of organisations and movements is the basics of sustainability, resilience and long-term change. This requires a long-term view of partnership that builds organisational capacity through multi-year core support.."

Increase support towards the establishment of new and growth of existing locally led women's and feminist funds.

Women's funds have proven to be a game changer for WROs and feminist organisations in the global south. They are more than just funders - they provide community and accountability, and because they are usually peer led, create room for participatory learning and growth, whilst providing much needed financial support. Ultimately, issues of financing are about power. Placing money into the hands of women's and feminist funds is one sure way of shifting power – giving them power to collectively decide where, how, to who and when to deploy resources.

About the author

Willson is a social innovator with interest in gender equality and social justice. He is the Executive Director of For Equality



Malawi for feminist movements and leadership...finally!

I had an argument the other week with some of my co-workers on whose Feminism is the correct version of Feminism. This was not a new argument to me, but one that I have had a tremendous amount of times in nearly every known space.

From social spaces over food and drinks, family in argument with my sisters, political spaces with decision makers and every other work space I have ever been in; each of these spaces sharing a common sentiment in that perhaps radical feminism and black women's feminism is "a little too much."

The men always felt offended that black women actively and loudly working to dismantle the systems of oppression, often shrouded in statements such as "What about men?" and the common, "Men are abused too." Whereas, others feel radical feminism is feminism taken too far, I remember the agreed upon sentiments questioning where black women's feminism leaves white women.

While these arguments are common and never ending largely because the patriarchy is actively working through each and every one of these people, this particular argument with my co-workers filled me with a bout of disappointment I had not felt in a long time.

That disappointment became anger, then sadness and ultimately became angry disappointment. The anger stemmed from two distinct points, the first being that a majority of those who opposed feminism have long claimed a sense of feminism with others having claimed to be allies of some sort; the second being the realization that while we have come so far in the fight for human rights, particularly women's rights, we still are a long way to go.

Now, Malawi as a nation, in our society and now-adopted culture, frowns upon all forms of feminism especially radical and intersectional feminism. We could blame this on colonization and the neo-liberalist oppressive systems that came with colonization; or perhaps the patriarchal system that we highly claim to be our own, yet reeks of colonial legacy.

"Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Therefore, it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels, as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires."

Bell Hooks.

From the national budget that for years has dedicated the least allocations to the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, the absence of Comprehensive Sex Education, the lack of proper Water, Health and Sanitation which devastatingly affects women and girl's menstrual hygiene and the extreme rise in cases of violence against women and girls, Malawi has slowly become quite the pitiful hub for gender Inequalities evidenced by our long standing reign in the 170's out of 188 countries on the Gender Inequality Index.

Perhaps this is why it was a welcome surprise to find out that Malawi signed on as a global co-lead of the 'Feminist Movements and Leadership' Action Coalition of the Generation Equality Forum, which has this bold vision; *"We envision that by 2026, feminist leaders, movements, and organizations, including those led by trans, intersex and non-binary people, indigenous women, young feminists, and other historically excluded people, are supported to become sustainable, can carry out their work without fear of reprisal, and advance gender equality, peace, and human rights for all."*

A refreshing change of pace, yes, however one to approach with caution perhaps given Malawi's history of resistance to actual change, particularly change that will lead to improving women and girls lives in the country. An example could be the simple yet complex fact that Malawi as a nation is signatory to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), the Convention of the Elimination on All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) alongside many other international, regional and local conventions, treaties and policies on the protection of women and girl's rights; yet as I am writing these words, the various courts of Malawi are flooded with a ridiculous amount of cases to do with various forms of violence against women and girls, especially rape and defilement cases which are on an astronomical rise.

Other examples include the failure to achieve the 60:40 threshold in decision making and public appointments - A paltry 66 out of 400+ Councillors and 22% of parliamentarians are women. Perhaps the slow progress is because of a lack of political will?

Because of that, among many other lived experiences of women and girls in Malawi, this pledge by the Malawi Government towards Feminist Movements and Leadership is one we must keep a very close eye on, to ensure that this is not another empty promise but an opportunity that can be leveraged to drive real and lasting change, starting from within government and the public sector. Perhaps, my co-workers will finally see the necessity of feminism in all its forms for development.

Article by: **Jessica Mandanda**

Jessica is the Editor of **The Response**.

She is a Gender and Communications specialist with over 3 years in advocacy communications and programming. She is a published writer with a passion for feminist activism, ending violence against women and girls and championing sexual health and rights.

She is a GRO-GEST Fellow, Young African Leaders Initiative Alumni (YALI), Feminist Macroeconomics Academy Alumni and Country Coordinator for the International Youth Alliance for family planning.



Fighting gender inequalities, an intersectional approach

As the fight for gender equality gains traction, one may be tempted to think it is a new phenomenon, but it is not. History is pregnant with stories of women and their allies who have been fighting the various forms of inequality that exist in our world.

As a young woman growing in and learning more about these inequalities, I have seen the cross cutting nature of our struggles. For instance, when we speak of violence against women and girls, it manifests in so many different forms which include physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse, and ultimately each of these manifestations affect other aspects of our lives such as our health, education, decision making and participation in society.

According to Global Partners Transforming Education 2019, 70% of women in Africa are excluded financially yet 60% of all the work done globally is by women, earning 10% income and owning 1% of property. One can clearly see the inequality in the distribution of work, income, land and property with women having the least access to these key aspects of basic human survival.

Another example is that of bodily autonomy, where the majority of African countries are maintaining and in some cases, further entrenching restrictive laws on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. The refusals to push for progressive laws and legislation on key issues such as access to modern contraception and safe abortion and the silencing of progressive voices are the order of the day.

What of the women living in poverty who are adversely affected as they lack access to family planning information, commodities, and services? Religious and cultural setups have also contributed immensely to this oppression of women and girls by denying them their bodily autonomy through giving decision making power to men, sidelining women's voices in matters affecting their reproductive health.

The onset of Covid-19 has extremely exacerbated each inequality, making life harder for women and girls. Most national budgets have re-routed funds from women's health to Covid-19 responses, the burden of care work being placed on women has increased both at household level and as frontline responders with the majority of caregivers and

nurses in Covid-19 wards are women...yet women's labour remains unpaid and where it is paid, is grossly underpaid in comparison to men.

The pandemic has also seen to the rise of cases of violence against women as most men have been forced to spend more time at home, for one reason or the other. This has left many women 'stuck at home' with their abusers and with nowhere to go to seek justice, as the justice systems struggle to cope with the increased cases and the new operating conditions.

It is clear that the pandemic wears a woman's face! But it has also given us an opportunity - that as the world seeks to rebuild and recover, we can press the reset button and ensure that the intersectionality of gender inequalities is acknowledged and that gender equality is mainstreamed into every response and recovery effort.

The Generation Equality campaign is a great platform to leverage on as it provides a framework for catalytic action to accelerate progress. But for it to work, we have to hold commitment makers accountable for every commitment made. Time is up for gender inequality! We owe it to ourselves and future generations to 'build a more equal and just society'.

By **Evelyn Odhiambo**

Evelyn is a Kenyan Based Freelance writer with a goal to challenge the narrative of dominant oppression.

She is also the Youth Coordinator at Reproductive Health Network Kenya.
@Eve_Odhis



JOIN THE CONVERSATION

We want to hear from you!

The Response would be nothing without the voices of our readers. Each month, we invite you to add share your thoughts on our feature story by joining the conversation on our social media platforms and tuning in to our 'The Response' Podcast and Webinars.



Question of the month

"What needs to be done to ensure that the 40 Billion worth of commitments made at the Generation Equality Forum actually translate into real change for African women"?

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Use the hashtag #TheResponse or tune in to our Podcast



[https://anchor.fm/
the-response1](https://anchor.fm/the-response1)



Violence Against Women

ART PIECE: THE WITHERED FLOWER

Amabel Banda

FEATURE: SITTING ON THE CONTINUUM

Phindu Zaie Banda

POETRY: NUMBERS

Jessica Mandanda



'The withered flower'
By Amabel Banda

Sitting on the continuum

Have we gotten so used to acts of sexual violence that we have normalised abuse and harassment?

Phindu Zaie Banda

I don't often think about my rights, at least not in concrete terms, except when I actually have to. I rarely ever sit to mull over what it is to be free, to have freedom, to be considered a free being. What it is to have autonomy over one's own body, what the word "autonomy" even means, what it means to exist fully as a human being and participate in normal life and do so without the looming fear of being stripped even of your most essential rights until you are bare.

I go about my life as I imagine many people do: living in non-absolute terms and learning by the day that life and its freedoms are not always black and white. Worse still, I am learning more and more that rights and freedoms, particularly for women like me, are like a thin rug on a very slippery floor: always snugly underfoot with the occasional, forgivable wrinkle – until someone aggressively pulls this rug from right under you with no warning and no excuse.

These last couple of weeks, I found myself sitting uncomfortably on the cold, hard ground, having fallen bum-first when my rug of rights was ripped from under me. I sat for hours at a time in deep thought, asking myself what it is that I had lost, especially as the circumstances surrounding my tumultuous emotional state could be considered by many as rather trivial. If I looked objectively at what had me in a puddle of tears, I could say it wasn't "that big a deal." Others had, in fact, told me just that.

What was yet another man sliding his unwelcome hand down the small of my back?

What was this man, after I had told him not to touch me, going on to caress my butt? Was it a big deal? What was a group of men staring at me like I was crazy when I said that he was in the wrong? What was another man, taller than me, literally looking down at me and telling me I was overreacting to just a small, small touch? Was this not a violation of my body? Was this not an assault on my body? Was this not wrong? What was it?

I went back and forth with myself over the matter for days – knowing full well that I felt wronged and violated and that alone should be enough to make it valid, yet replaying the disbelieving amusement of those who witnessed the incident and later, those I confided in when I felt like I would implode. Was it that I had experienced a micro-violation? Yes, I had been "assaulted," but the word itself seems to signal such a horrendously brutal act that a few stray hands on one's back and later their butt cannot possibly be considered as such, can it?

I had almost convinced myself that I was, indeed, overreacting when something that was said on an episode of "Feministing While Malawian" caught my attention and jolted me awake. The episode, "Let's Talk about the Continuum of Sexual Violence," explored the different degrees of sexual violence, highlighting the fact that as a people, we have generally come to consider some acts of violation as more worthy of reproach than others. When one is raped (God forbid), we will be shocked. We will have sympathy. We will call the perpetrator an abuser and label the victim a victim. When one is

catcalled or groped or has a stray hand purposely find a private body part, we “tsk tsk tsk” and move on.

feministing
while
malawian

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE CONTINUUM OF
SEXUAL VIOLENCE

FEMINISTING WHILE MALAWIAN

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We seem to have collectively looked at the continuum of sexual violence and silently agreed that the acts of violence on one end will be grave injustices while those on the other end can be overlooked. Perhaps due to the frequency and commonality with which some of these things happen - the whistles, the suggestive comments, the touches, all of it - we have normalised abuse and harassment to such an extent that we do not even expect victims to be victims.

When bad things happen to us, when our rights are violated in some way, we first sit in the corner and ask ourselves whether there actually has been a violation. We pick apart our roles in the messy affair and try to decide whether or not we can be blamed for what happened; whether or not we are in opposition to claim our full humanity and therefore our freedoms.

More often than not, we succeed in being convinced that despite what we feel, what we know to be true, there is nothing to be lamented.

I was forced to think about my rights after this incident and with all Umba and Lusungu said on that episode. I was forced to pick apart how I have looked at my freedom to dress and speak and just exist, with the added cloud of how everything seems to exist in relative as opposed to absolute terms. The way I feel or respond towards what I term as a violation of my person will obviously not be same as the next person, but nonetheless there should be an objective respect for every form of violence on the continuum.

When the rug is pulled from under me, I imagine I would find something to hold on to if I were not made to feel like what has happened to me is not aggressive enough to be aggressive. I wish I'd learnt this fact earlier in life, for all the comments and touches and escalating violations. I wish I had learnt that even the smallest form of an act is the act itself; it is wrong and my hurt, my anger, is right.



By **Phindu Zaie Banda**.

Creative writer whose work centred on women and their lived experiences. She is renowned for using raw emotions to illustrate the various dimensions of femininity

Twitter and Instagram - @phinduzaie
Facebook - @thephinduzaie & Phindu Zaie Banda

Numbers

By Jessica Mandanda

The world seems to be burning
That is what the man on the television said
He said the third wave approaches and we must take caution
Mask Up! He said, Keep your distance
Shield yourselves! Protect yourself and others, he emphasized,
I wonder, if that Policeman accused of defiling that young girl in custody remembered to mask up
that night,
Surely he did, enforcer of the law, how could he not?

They called a global state of emergency, in light of the pandemic
The headlines reading, the numbers could be your family,
The numbers are people, and so the headlines become hashtags,
The world is on high alert,
I remember when we said the same thing years ago,
As the #MeToo movement became a global call for action,
We said, the numbers are your family, your friends,
Not could be, but will be,
Because the statistics show, that today, in this minute, a woman is dying because of violence,
We cried, we begged, we pleaded,
And said the numbers are lives of women lost,
The world remained calm, and women died.

They are calling it a shadow pandemic now,
Because the numbers are worse than before,
With the pandemic followed the pandemic women are all too familiar with,
The man on the television said home is where is safest,
But home is where women are dying, not from the pandemic everyone is focused on,

The numbers are lives, the numbers are growing,
The world is burning and women are dying,
But the world forgets easy, of the numbers that represent the women who have died from the
shadow pandemic,
You see the world has been shaken by Covid-19,
And women have long been shaken by violence,

Violence is not a shadow pandemic, it is the pandemic,
The numbers do not lie, the numbers are faces, lives, people,
The numbers are women, dying.

M E N T A L

H E A L T H

M A T T E R S

ADVOCACY NOTE: THE
NEED FOR MENTAL HEALTH
SENSITIZATION

Tadiwanashe Burukai-Matutu

The need for mental health sensitization



The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed systemic frailties and shortcomings throughout health systems worldwide. Recently, the crisis surpassed a devastating milestone, with over 2.3 million people having died from COVID-19. Many countries are still not following the evidence. Information sharing is needed to inform best practices and help countries reorient their public health strategies. Our responsibility as community development practitioners, health service providers and political gatekeepers is to ensure everyone in the community is healthy. Health is a state of well-being inclusive of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

The struggle against COVID-19 will not be overcome unless we work together on a larger scale. For these reasons, we must ensure the Mental well-being of everyone is prioritized, information must be readily accessible so that it can be taken advantage of to the fullest extent and the existence of community supportive pillars. Women and girls tend to be the vulnerable groups in society looking at the increased care giving work during lockdown, increased financial responsibilities and not forgetting the sexual and physical abuse some women have to bear. The need to focus more on localizing mental health education from the home set up, work set up as well as mainstream within the community.

Mental health is health and it matters! Supportive Systems that can be adopted and mainstreamed at home, work and diverse sectors in the community as well, are:

- Acknowledge that you are not well
- Seek help (Counselling, medical attention etc)
- Find activities that provide you with a peace of mind, exercise, gardening, tennis, cooking etc
- Inform your Superior that you are not well and it's affecting your performance.
- Institutions should have a support mental health system for their employees.
- Get enough sleep, rest and keep hydrated.
- Talk to your spouse, family and friends so they understand what's going on and they help
- Be Selfish and ensure you put your mental health first.

Let's keep having these discussions and ensure we provide the support we all need.

This Advocacy Note was written by **Tadiwanashe Burukai-Matutu**

Tadiwanshe is the Executive Director of Womandla Foundation, a proud feminist, academic and passionate creative writer. She has over 10 years experience in development work.

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SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & RIGHTS

OPINION: LET'S TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT SEX

Mphatso Makamo

ANALYSIS: HER BODY, HER CHOICE

Yeukai Gezah

ADVOCACY NOTE: WE LIVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY

Jessica Mandanda

Let's talk to children about sex

The importance of educating children on their sexual and reproductive rights.

In our culture there are a lot of things which are off limits, topics that are never discussed and one of those is sex. Because of this, I, like many other children learnt about sex from the television and gossip.

According to the revised Malawi National Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Policy enacted in 2017 it was noted that most young people start having sex at the age of 12 and high risk sexual behavior is most common between 15 and 24. I'll let that sink in.

Oftentimes, SRHR information that is shared is based on myths and is not factual. If it's not from the pipeline of fellow youth, friends, school and traditional media, it's from social media and the internet. While the internet is a beautiful place, it is also equally filled with terrible and wrong information that can alter one's worldview. If a child bursting at the seams with raging hormones is exposed to pornography for example, their view of sex is most likely to be skewed with unrealistic expectations. They will grow up without understanding that sex is about consent and communication.

It's important to teach boys that sex should be respectful and that even when they feel the urge to engage in sex with another person they should communicate, be patient and able to understand that they or the person they are engaging in sex with can withdraw consent at any time. It's important to teach girls that they have every right to stop the sexual activity at any point when they feel uncomfortable or have changed their minds (this applies to boys as well), and that they should feel free to communicate and make sure that the experience is enjoyable for them as well.

Children should be educated on the responsibilities that come with being sexually active. Sexual responsibility includes key things such as, being regularly tested for sexually transmitted diseases and infections, always using protection, and the different methods of contraception.

In addition, it is also important to teach both boys and girls that sex is not just for the purpose of procreation but recreation as well.

Being open and educating children about sex can lessen the risks of unwanted pregnancies and disease. Abstinence teaching alone, without incorporating other aspects of sexuality education, is not only backward and archaic but harmful. Abstinence is not a one size fits all! By depriving children of comprehensive sexuality education and information, we inadvertently are promoting unhealthy and uninformed sexual choices. It is time for us to push for comprehensive sexuality education. It is the right thing to do!

Youth friendly health centres, where they are truly youth friendly, have proven to be gamechangers - they create safe spaces for conversations and access to services. There is a definite need for increased investment to train more youth friendly providers and establish more centers across the country.

By **Mphatso Makamo**

Mphatso is a film director and writer, passionate about all things creative.

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In Zimbabwe 25% of unintended pregnancies end in abortion



More than 65,000 induced abortions in 2016

Source: Dally et al., "Abortion in Zimbabwe"

ABORTION IN ZIMBABWE

Source: <http://www.prb.org/SAFE-ENGAGE>

Her body, her choice!

Some years back, I made friends with this girl whom I am going to name Tasha. She lived in a different town with her family. On a few occasions, I would visit her. We would spend time in their nice city that is just as small as mine, and I was actually beginning to know a few spots in the CBD. We spent much of our time loitering and window-shopping. Sometimes we would shop a little but what was priceless was the time we spent together. For someone with a few friends, I always looked forward to the visits. A few months into our friendship, Tasha told me she was pregnant and on her way to South Africa for an abortion. No one from her family knew she was travelling to SA, let alone that she had fallen pregnant. I could tell she was scared and so was I. I hated the fact that there was nothing I could do to help as young as we were. When she eventually left for South Africa, we kept in touch for a while via texts.

I would check on her now and then, knowing South Africa is not a friendly country especially to foreigners. Out of the blue, our communication broke down and I stopped hearing back from her. With every day that passed without hearing from her, I was drowning in a pool of fear, for her safety, and confusion. Imagining a young woman travelling alone in a foreign country had me ticking off all the boxes on my vulnerability test. I became so unsettled that at some point I started creating imaginary headlines.

In my state of confusion, I asked myself a myriad of questions. I wondered if by not discouraging her to abort I had actually contributed to her 'being missing'. I also wondered, if I had discouraged her, would she have been able to take care of the child and what implications this could have on her life in general, knowing how poor service delivery and social protection is in Zimbabwe. Had I been there enough for her as a friend when she needed me the most? Had I been judgemental of her decision?

Ultimately, It dawned on me that it was never my place to decide for her or influence her decision. In whose shoes would I stand in to determine what was best for her? My job as a friend should have been to be there for her and support her through her decisions.

Fast forward to months later, I saw an update on facebook. Tasha posted a picture of her holding a beautiful baby. I had not spoken to her since her trip to SA. I didn't even know that she was still alive. I was overjoyed to see my friend was alive and well.

I took my time looking at the picture, zoomed in and out trying to imagine what could have happened from the last time we spoke. Of course, the picture would not give any answers except knowing that she had changed her mind and decided to keep the baby.

I thought of how awkward it would be to randomly pop up with a reaction to the picture after all this while. Maybe because I really was not of help when she needed a friend, she had made a decision to cut our friendship ties. Maybe by reaching out I would remind her of the decision that she almost took. At this point, I realized, in as much as I would have wanted to know what happened, Tasha owed me no explanation. After all, it would be a burden to explain. We lost our friendship but she gained family!

Tasha's story is one of the many stories of Zimbabwean girls and women. It raises many issues concerning Sexual Reproductive Health Rights. In particular, the right to bodily integrity and autonomy, access to SRHR services such as abortion services and the context of abortion in Zimbabwe. Abortion is still illegal in Zimbabwe save for a few instances as provided for by the Termination of Pregnancy Act No. 29 of 1977. This leaves girls and women with limited options, either having an illegal backyard abortion, which is life threatening or travelling to South Africa for an abortion where it is legal.

The Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe guarantees the right to bodily integrity under S52 on the right to personal security. It states that, "**Every person has the right to bodily and psychological integrity, which includes the right— b. subject to any other provision of the Constitution, to make decisions concerning reproduction.**" However, even with such a lucid provision by the Constitution, bearing in mind that it is the supreme law of Zimbabwe, abortion is quite a sensitive topic with very strictly limited rights.

During the lockdown period in April 2021, the government of Zimbabwe reported what it regarded as 'a major increase' in teenage pregnancies, with a record of about 5 000 teenage girls who fell pregnant between the months of January and February. This could be attributed to the stringent regulations and recurring lockdowns, which limit mobility, thereby restricting timely and easy access to SRHR services e.g. emergency contraception but in most cases.

Zimbabwe has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women which provides for the protection of women's SRHR. It is required by CEDAW for all health services, "...to be consistent with the human rights of women, including rights to autonomy, privacy, confidentiality, informed consent and choice." In a joint statement by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination on 29 August 2018, the committees urged state parties to decriminalize abortion in all circumstances and legalize it in a manner that fully respects the autonomy of women including women with disabilities. Zimbabwe continues to burn daylight without reforming the Termination of Pregnancy Act but the consequences are weighty.

Unsafe abortions account for many deaths and health complications among girls and women in Zimbabwe. It is an exceptionally sensitive topic, especially in religious circles that regard abortion as sin. Are religious people especially Christians not taking a hypocritical approach from that standpoint? Which sin is greater? While we are not legalizing abortion because some regard it as murder, we have allowed unsafe abortions. We are still choosing to kill regardless because there is loss of life either during or after the process. It should be and always is a woman's choice to make and the government has to make that possible by legalizing abortion. Better save a life than lose two.

Article by :**Yeukai Gezah**

Yeukai is a human rights law blogger and enthusiast. She currently is a Legal intern and at the same time is coordinating the expansion efforts of For Equality into Zimbabwe .

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We live to fight another day!

“...I spoke my mind. I think that must have shaken them a bit; an African woman who could understand things, talk sense and find words and reasons for resentment she felt when confronted by injustice.” Vera Chirwa

There is a familiar voice echoing in my head as I read Vera Chirwa’s book and how she fought. Word after word, she speaks to the advocate I am and with each paragraph expressing her frustration with the injustice Malawians faced before independence remind me of the frustration the lot of us felt after we were told that Parliament had shut down the Termination of Pregnancy bill.

It made me think of the years it had taken to just bring Safe Abortion to the table as a worthy conversation, and the months we had spent travelling throughout the country to sensitize people on why the bill was necessary. The nights and mornings we had spent discussing what would work and what would not, and most of all, who was going to pay for all the ideas that were brought to the table, only to be told it was not enough.

I remember returning to my Mother’s house that evening after we had spent our afternoon scorched under the sun with our placards, and my mother giving me a sympathetic look and telling me ‘this was just the beginning’.

She took a breath and sat opposite me and started telling me about her fight for Women’s Land Rights, swiftly emphasizing that it took 12 years for that bill to pass in the Malawian Parliament and how they had started exactly where we were - a rejected bill, shattered hopes, millions spent and women’s lives hanging in the balance.

There are many steps in the long journey to have a bill passed in the Malawian Parliament, especially if the bill is specifically aimed at addressing an atrocity that Malawian women face on a daily basis. The Termination Of Pregnancy (TOP) Bill, that was introduced after so many women and girls lost their lives to the complications of unsafe abortions, a tragedy that can and will well be avoided by legalizing Safe Abortion, is no exception.

Perhaps the most infuriating part of this entire process was listening to the nonsense that was passed by ‘supposedly learned and woke’ people. Common lines include, “Women will still die because legalizing Safe abortions opens the door for carelessness by women which will result in an abortion by demand “crisis”, which goes against the moral fabric of the country” and “We should be advocating for abstinence and asking women to be mindful of how they behave to avoid unintended pregnancies”.

I have been lost for words, stuck in between anger and plain disbelief that such a deliberate misunderstanding of women’s rights fueled by archaic beliefs and faux morality is used as a justification for letting women die.

Considering the highly patriarchal nature of all the systems that run Malawi, women retaining any sense of authority or power does not sit well with the majority of the leaders who are obviously men. A quick analysis of the narrative of the opposition to the TOP Bill clearly reinforces my argument that it is men who are fighting to keep their power over women's bodies.

Fighting for the TOP bill has brought both joy and bitterness - joy because we know we are on the right side of history and that before any major changes are made to a country’s laws or policies, there is often mass discomfort first, then change after the discomfort; and bitterness because while we fight the opposition, women continue to die, and that is unfortunate.

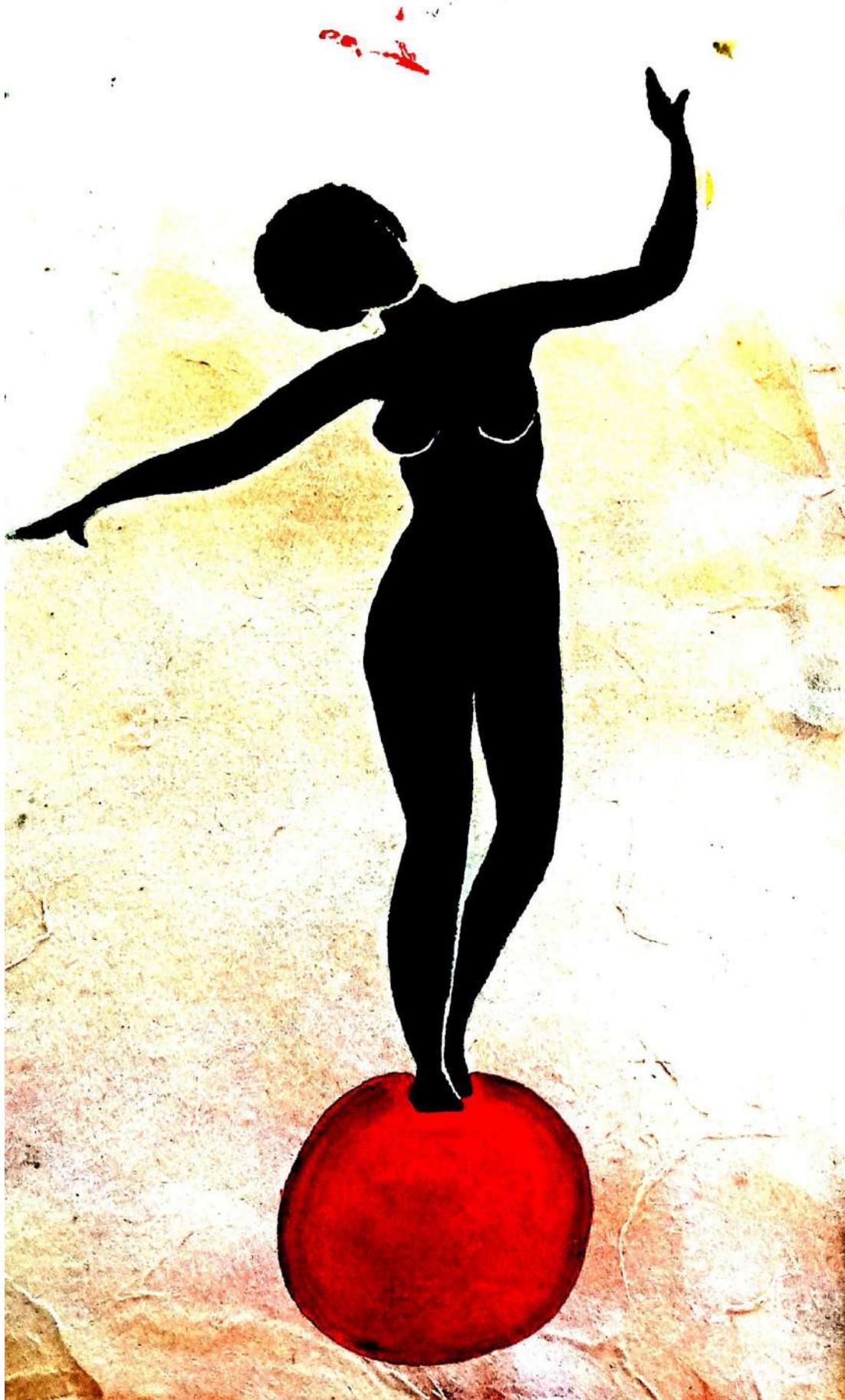
I wish I could end on a positive note, however, I will end on a hopeful note, that at the least, we live to fight another day! Our fight is for all the women we have needlessly lost and for every woman in Malawi whose right it is to choose today what to do with her body.

By Jessica Mandanda

Blood Warrior!

By Amabel Banda

A celebration of all the women fighting for bodily autonomy





SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Image: Hivos, Women@Work Campaign

FEATURE: COVID19, GENDER AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Thokozani Mkandawire

INFOGRAPHIC: ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID19 ON WOMEN

UN Women

Covid19, Gender & Economic Justice



Image: Hivos, Women@Work Campaign

The severe impact that the covid-19 pandemic has had can clearly be seen in the number of lives lost, businesses that have closed down, jobs that have been lost and the deterioration of the average person's wellbeing and livelihood. Poverty and extreme poverty are on a steady rise, while livelihood standards of many people continue to fall by the day. The pandemic has deeply exposed the inadequacies of our systems, and the shock which they continue to suffer, over 15 months into the pandemic is evidence of how fragile they are.

Evidence shows that humanitarian crises are not gender neutral. Disasters affect everyone differently - women, girls, boys and men are impacted differently and will respond and recover differently. Inevitably, it is women and girls who have been disproportionately affected by the Covid19 pandemic.

Women in Malawi form the majority of the people in the informal economy. With COVID-19 travel restrictions and reduced disposable income, most small-scale businesses have lost customers and business, resulting in reduced income. This means that many women who rely on small scale income generating activities as a source of their livelihood have been left unable to provide for themselves and their dependents. In a country

where women face complex challenges in starting businesses, this is a huge setback on the efforts that have been made to this effect and towards the economic empowerment of women. In a nutshell, there are now even lower capacities for women to earn an income for themselves and live decent livelihoods.

At the same time, there have been increased levels of job insecurity for women. This is in both formal and informal sectors of the economy. Whether it is an office job or domestic work or sex work, all the sectors where women occupy a large share of jobs have proven to be insecure and without the needed security and decent work conditions.

It also has not helped that women are overrepresented in service sectors such as tourism and sales, which have been amongst the hardest hit. Today, women are more likely to accept lower payments for their services or work in compromised conditions because the pandemic has taken away their choice.

Given the levels of inequality, the employability chances for women who have lost their jobs are even lower. Women are therefore being left at the mercy of unemployment or underemployment and without any protection from the economic shocks

that they are facing including lack of decent housing, food insecurity, period poverty and exacerbated poverty levels in general.

Aside from the job insecurity itself, women are generally more likely to be the ones taking time off from working in order to take care of their relations in these times. Due to prevalent harmful social norms, women already perform a larger share of unpaid care work. The care burden has drastically increased as women take care of their sick family members, whilst performing their daily care responsibilities made worse by the increased hours that people are generally spending in their households.

This disproportionately exposes women to contracting the virus but also significantly reduces the amount of time that they can spend on income generation or any other activities that can serve as a source of their livelihood thus again putting women at an even greater economic disadvantage.

Analysing the impact of the pandemic on women's economic power requires an intersectional lens. The same woman who has lost her job, has also had to close her small business and is burdened with increased care responsibilities.

Whilst economic disparities have always been in existence, the pandemic has visibly widened the gaps even further, with more women living in poverty and are in situations that are worse off than before.

There has been a phrase that has been used as a joke of late "pa ground sipali bho", translated 'things are not well on the ground'. Indeed, things are not well for the millions of women in Malawi, whose livelihoods and futures have been severely compromised.

There are many things that the government can and should do at this time. For starters, government has to, strengthen its social protection programmes such as the cash transfers; make menstrual hygiene products more accessible and cheaper through reduction of import tax, among other things; provide social safety nets and security for women working in informal sectors including domestic work and sex work; step up efforts to tackle gender based violence through strengthening response mechanisms and taking stricter punitive action against perpetrators; and implement gender responsive fiscal policies and response and recovery mechanisms.

Perhaps most importantly, more women must be included and lead in covid-19 response and recovery decision making to ensure that their needs are prioritised.

"**Nothing for women without women!**"



Article By: **Thokozani Mkandawire**

Thokozani Mkandawire is a Malawian writer and development practitioner. Some of her published works include a short story titled

"The preacher", an essay titled "The problem: redefining desire and consent" as well as a poem with the title "love song". She is a voracious reader who is happiest when reading fiction, more so fiction told by African writers. She holds a bachelor's degree in Development studies and resides in Lilongwe, Malawi, where she works in research, development and gender

Economic impact of Covid19 on women

Source: UN Women

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC



Women did nearly
three times as much
unpaid care and domestic work
as men.

SINCE THE PANDEMIC

A number of factors have added to women's
unpaid work at home. This includes:



**School
closures**



**Stretched
healthcare
systems**

Share of employed in informal employment

GLOBAL



REGIONAL



vs. **86%** of employed men

vs. **87%** of employed men

vs. **52%** of employed men

#CovidVoices

"This year has certainly not been a normal one. But then again, as science journalist Ed Yong elegantly put it, "Normal led to this".

Adelaida Sarukhan, Scientific writer

"COVID-19 highlights how truly interdependent we all are. How reliant we are on cooperation, communication, and compassion to successfully combat the virus. It highlights how important it is that we work together for a sustainable recovery that delivers for our economies and our planet."

Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand

**"Be safe,
be smart,
be kind"**

**Dr. Tedros Adhanom
Ghebreyesus**,

WHO Director General

"This pandemic has magnified every existing inequality in our society – like systemic racism, gender inequality, and poverty."

Melinda Gates

"During this pandemic, the most vulnerable have been the hardest hit ... We must increase our resilience. We must work together and take an integrated approach to health, hunger, climate, and equity crisis — no one is safe from COVID-19 until everyone is safe."

Volkan Bozkır, President of the United Nations General Assembly

"I do not know if ever I will recover from this pandemic. My shop closed down and I have not been able to reopen. I do not have the capital to restart the business"

Melody Banda

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