The impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is felt throughout the world, as it continues to spread across the globe in an unprecedented manner. In Africa, 33 out of 54 countries have confirmed cases of COVID-19 which has resulted in uncertainty and state-sanctioned precautionary measures that are changing our daily lives and routines. We are all struggling with the effects of school closures, lockdowns, self-isolation and social distancing. At Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-Africa) we prefer calling it ‘physical distancing’ as we recognize that social distancing fractures our feminist convictions on the usefulness of collective and community care at this critical moment. At UAF-Africa, we are noting that some of the national proposed risk mitigation measures if not authentically practiced might present instances of constitutional rights violations. We are alive to the fact that most, if not all, of the proposed precautionary measures are only applicable to the privileged. This is happening in total disregard to the fact that Africa has a high concentration of populations that encounter disproportionate socio-economic and health vulnerabilities.

In Africa, it is people who live at the margins of society including women in rural and urban slums, women refugees and prisoners, women in the informal economy like street vendors, care and sex workers, women with disabilities and those with HIV & AIDS among other chronic illnesses, and gender non-conforming people all face structural barriers in accessing information, water and sanitation, soap, sanitisers and protective gear to protect themselves and their loved ones. It is these same groups of people who fall into the low-income bracket thus lack basic social safety nets of health and accommodation services. Acknowledging the unavailability and weak health systems that have since been tested by previous Cholera, HIV & AIDS and Ebola pandemics in Africa, we already know that this COVID 19 will be no different from other pandemics in the feminisation of its impact.

At UAF-Africa we asking ourselves how national and public health authorities think marginalised and vulnerable people in our societies self-isolate in crowded cities and communities? How do informal workers; domestic workers, vendors, care workers, sex workers, and all women in the informal economy maintain ‘social distance’ when they cannot afford to self-isolate or take time off work and have their livelihoods literally shutdown with no national and vulnerable people-centric adaptation measures put in place? What will be the effects of the pandemic in areas with little or no access to water and lighting to see who one is sharing space with? Indeed, these are challenging times that require us to work as a collective to come up with creative and longstanding solutions that are informed by and tailor-made for our diverse contexts and constituencies.

Harnessing Collective and Community Care
It is in this regard that UAF-Africa is already working hard to bolster her rapid response grantmaking machinery to ensure women and gender non-conforming people’s dignity and rights are protected, respected and advanced during this time of crisis.

As a Women’s Fund that works with groups and individuals who are structurally marginalized, we strongly believe that our grantees, partners and ourselves will overcome this pandemic. Historically, UAF-Africa has supported women and gender non-conforming groups to turn the tide including during the HIV & AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa, we were there when it counted during the several Ebola crises in the DRC and in West Africa. During the 2014 Ebola crisis, the Fund, in addition to providing critical financial and technical support, conducted a rapid assessment survey in Liberia to explore the effects and gender dimensions of the Ebola epidemic. This survey was critical to gaining a gendered perspective on some of the psychological, social and economic shifts that Ebola created and on the local responses to the outbreak. UAF-Africa went on to cultivate knowledge production and wide dissemination of policy briefs and articles targeting public health and media organisations as well as policy makers. At UAF-Africa, we publicly celebrate the courage of women’s rights and gender non-conforming activists, organisations, and women social justice leaders who are leading at the frontlines of pandemics and related intersectional struggles.

As a feminist and women’s rights pan-African Fund, we will continue to utilise our Rapid Response Grantmaking (RRG) mechanism to support our grantees during this fast-evolving COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we are already supporting initiatives that:

- Develop and widely disseminate gendered messages and information about the disease;
- Simplify and/or translate the complex COVID 19 information that is being shared by governments and public health experts into simple and local languages;
- Conduct action research/document the effects of the pandemic on women and gender non-conforming groups;
- Address issues of gender-based violence particularly aggravated by COVID 19;
- Respond to practical needs such as food, water, gloves, masks and so on;
- Create awareness/education on the COVID 19 at the grassroots level targeting informal sector rural/urban slums communities and other at-risk groups. Furthermore, we will support strategic, sustainable, bold and unique initiatives that will be proposed by our constituencies across Africa.

UAF-Africa assures her current grantees that we will walk and work with you during this trying moment. The grantmaking team stands ready to fully discuss changes to the implementation of your activities. Specifically, we encourage you to reach out to your respective Grantmaking Officers to discuss the possibility of:

- Shifting your activities to align with the current environment and challenges.
- Postponing or cancelling some activities, especially those related to physical convening and meetings.
- Delaying some grant deliverables such as reports.
- Discussing how some resources might already have been sunk into anticipated meetings and campaign preparations that will now not happen.
Importantly, the UAF-Africa grantmaking team is available to receive your grants requests/proposals 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 a year. All grant requests will be acknowledged within 24 hours and resources wired out to successful grantees within 72 hours after necessary due diligence has been conducted. For further information on our RRG mechanism, we request you to check out the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) at https://www.uaf-africa.org/what-we-do/rapid-response-grantmaking/ – at the bottom of the page or email us and we can chat to clarify any issues, especially relating to the support we are offering in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. UAF-Africa staff are available to respond to your questions and concerns. You can contact us on proposals@uaf-africa.org with the subject line: Changes to the implementation plan. Alternatively, you can reach out directly to our Grantmaking Coordinator at carol@uaf-africa.org. Additionally, you can call us on +254 732 577 560.

Our organizational structure facilitates Rapid Response Action

UAF-Africa works as a virtual organization with two anchoring offices in Harare and Nairobi. The Fund boasts of strategic physical presence in 5 sub-regions of Africa; Kampala, Uganda; Nairobi, Kenya; Bujumbura, Burundi; Yaoundé, Cameroon; Dakar, Senegal; Abuja, Nigeria, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Harare Zimbabwe. With such a wide web of ‘on the ground’ support, we are keeping our finger on the pulse of COVID 19 and ensuring that we tap into the intelligence we are gathering from our networks on how best to support women’s rights and gender non-conforming activists, organisations and movements during this crisis.

Staff safety and wellbeing

The safety and wellbeing of our staff is important to us. Since last week, office-based staff are working from home with full ICT support and tools to ensure that our grantmaking and you are not inconvenienced. As a feminist Fund, we are innovating as we respond to the crisis. This has seen our People & Culture team working flat out to ensure that our team members’ fears and needs in balancing their personal and professional lives – especially where schools have shut down and children are at home, caring of the elderly and invalid still demands their added attention. Again, this is quite unprecedented and demands that staff engage in conscious planning, flexi-time and communication with work colleagues and family members for work to still continue. We believe that the only way we can beat this pandemic is by collectively sharing how we are coping personally, organizationally as communities. This way, we each learn and strengthen our collective resistance and resilience strategies, for what is the use of one person’s wellness if the community is unwell!

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‘Cross the river in a crowd and the crocodile won’t eat you.’

Let us keep ourselves, our friends, our families, our colleagues and our countries safe and well. Community and collective care are very much encouraged during this moment. Together, we will turn this tide! In solidarity and co-responsibility, UAF-Africa Team

Our social media platforms are open for messaging

@UAFAfrica Urgentactionfundafrica Urgent Action Fund Africa