

Quick information for Members of Parliament in Denmark – UNDP Africa (HIV, Health & Development) Team 15 May 2020

Overview of UNDP's work in Africa on HIV/AIDS and the impact of COVID-19

Overview of UNDP's HIV, Health & Development Work in Africa

- UNDP is currently working in 26 countries in sub-Saharan Africa supporting national governments and civil society organisations, as well as the African continental and regional entities (the AUC, ACHPR, EAC, the SADC and SADC-Parliamentary Forum and the WAHO/ECOWAS) to ensure a **human-rights based approach** to HIV, TB and malaria interventions with a focus on key and vulnerable populations (including with sex workers, men who have sex with men, LGBTIQ people, people who use drugs and incarcerated groups). This work is funded primarily through bilateral donors. In addition, UNDP has just launched an 'Inclusive Governance Initiative' focused on LGBTIQ people and their human rights in sub-Saharan Africa.
- UNDP's role in the UN Joint Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) focuses on HIV prevention among key populations together with UNFPA; supporting Investment and efficiency of HIV related investments together with the World Bank, and ensuring programmes address Human rights, stigma and discrimination focusing on legal and policy reform, access to justice and rights; and elimination of HIV health-care stigma and discrimination. This is supported by the UNAIDS UBRAF Funding mechanism.
- In addition, UNDP supports the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) programmes in Africa as Principal Recipient for 11 grants in 7 countries;¹ has grants for supporting the Country Coordinating Mechanisms in Sao Tome et Principe and Zimbabwe; has financing agreements for procurement and supply chain management in 5 countries;² an agreement with Gavi in Zambia for health systems strengthening support; and **Solar for Health** project in 7 countries.³
- Finally UNDP supports through a number of global projects/interventions, in collaboration with the WHO, the FCTC and other partners on working in several African countries on elimination of tobacco use, universal health coverage, understanding modalities to tackle non-communicable diseases, ensuring sustainable procurement for health (supplies, waste management, energy needs etc.), and for increased access to newer health technologies.

Quick overview on the impact of COVID-19 on UNDP's work related to HIV and AIDS and Key and Vulnerable Populations

- Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in several African countries, UNDP Headquarters, regional bureaux and country offices have been at the forefront of providing emergency support in terms of setting up support based on the 3 pillars: resilient health systems including health

¹ Angola, Burundi, Chad, Guinea-Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe, South Sudan, Zimbabwe

² Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique & Zambia

³ Angola, Namibia, South Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Chad and Liberia

procurement support; addressing socio-economic impacts of COVID-19; and inclusive and multi-sectoral crisis management and response to COVID-19.

- As part of this work, UNDP's Africa team have been providing direct support to countries in responding to the epidemic, and at the same time corresponding with its partners and civil society organisations to understand the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic on people affected with or at higher risk of HIV, including people living with HIV, LGBTIQ+ groups and key populations.

Examples of oppression and challenges to freedom for LGBTIQ+ people

- [Accountability International](#) a UNDP partner has already published a series of online notes on this issue and how it affects LGBTIQ and key and vulnerable populations. They report that *"Communities such as the **LGBTIQ** community that are already marginalized and vulnerable due to a range of factors including poverty and discrimination, now face further challenges during the pandemic; many are in fact rendered even more at-risk due to the response of authorities under emergency regulations. A now well-known example is that on [29 March on the outskirts of Kampala, Uganda, when the police raided a shelter and arrested 14 gay men](#), four transgender women, and two bisexual men, charging them with breaking social distancing rules (set at a maximum of 10 people and since reduced to five); equal rights campaigners have countered that the arrests were motivated by homophobia and transphobia and not the emergency regulations."* It also reports that there is alarming silence on sexual and gender based violence and LGBTIQ+ people from the African Heads of States' [communiqué](#) of 3rd April 2020 related to their teleconference. [AI reports](#): *"African Heads of State have been largely silent on the looming threats, despite the dire warnings from the UN and civil society for government to put special measures in place that protect women, girls, and LGBTIQ people. For example, an African Union (AU) Bureau of Heads of State and Government communiqué on the African response does not mention SGBV or gender once, nor does it speak to concerns about the effects of restrictive movement measures on these vulnerable and marginalized groups."*
- One of the challenges for LGBTIQ people, particularly in African countries – many of which continue to criminalise adult same sex relations – is their inability, in time of COVID-19 to seek and enjoy communal spaces which "are a lifeline for many LGBTIQ+ folk. As [Muthoni Ngige](#) of Minority Women in Action (MWA) Kenya mentioned in an interview, virtual safe spaces are becoming very important for LGBTIQ+ people to regain their community lives as "the home is not a safe space for most LGBTIQ+ folk". She however warned that safety for their members continues to be high priority even in virtual spaces which are rife with homophobia and slut-shaming.
- There are additional reports that queer and LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers from African countries too are hard hit by the 'lockdown' and closure of international travel as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Poignant tales of loss of hope due to abrupt closure of international travel and challenges faced by queers to seek livelihoods and maintain social distancing in cramped quarters have been reported by the online portal [New Frame](#).
- Concerns have further been raised by queer activists of the challenge that COVID-19 brings in terms of enforcing conservative viewpoints and practice. An online site for opinions and new

writings, [Africa is a Country](#) reports that for example, in Senegal, gay people are being threatened into heterosexual marriages by their families during this time, and says that “COVID-19 does not only threaten the social fabric of society. It can also fuel the opposite—a tightening of control over people’s behavior, in order to perpetuate a conservative social order.”

Examples of rights violations and oppression targeting key and vulnerable populations

- Reports from **Kenya** also point at eviction of female sex workers from their towns and places of residence over ‘fears of spreading COVID-19’. A report from a local [newspaper](#) says that local leaders expelled ‘sex workers who operate along the Tororo-Mbale highway accusing them of aiding the spreading of Covid-19’. Similar incidents have also come to light from [Uganda](#) where local sex workers have reported not only restriction and limitation of their work, but also report increased violence faced from clients when they have refused unsafe sexual services.
- In April 21st, the **Kenyan** [Daily Nation](#) reported that 24 sex workers had been arrested and were to be quarantined. This followed a raid when “security officials at Emali township arrested them, along with six of their clients, on Monday evening for violating State directives meant to combat spread of Covid-19”.
- In addition to arrests and forceful detentions, sex workers in **Kenya** have [appealed for COVID-19 support](#) and even initiated an emergency fund-raising drive. They complained that in addition to being victims of violence and police harassment during curfews, they also faced the challenge of transport to their friendly healthcare facilities. The sex workers’ alliance KESWA noted that “Sex workers community faces challenges such as violation of health and human rights, lack of access to health services and violence meted out on them by their clients, the public and law enforcement officers” and noted that the government’s restrictive measures have economically affected them.
- A [statement](#) from the executive director of South African Network of People who Use Drugs (SANPUD) highlights additional challenges people who use drugs face during COVID-19 lockdowns and curfews. The statement highlights that “*Marginalised, disenfranchised, stigmatised, and ‘othered’ communities will suffer disproportionately,*” and says that for PWUD and sex workers, there “*is the added layer of criminalisation.*” The statement also highlights the shortfall in services for PWUD as the “*exorbitant price of methadone and other medicines used to help resolve dependent use, the reluctance to support harm reduction services and continued criminalisation have been barriers to expanding services.*” To mitigate harm, SANPUD has also put up an [online resource site on COVID-19](#) that they “trust” to support their members during the time of the pandemic.
- In South Africa, a [press statement issued by a number of human rights organisations](#) have called on the South African government to address the plight of sex workers during COVID-19 crisis in the interest of ‘all South Africans’. The statement strongly condemns the government saying: “*Although the government has provided immediate financial and food aid to alleviate the economic and other related impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic, sex workers in South Africa have been neglected. Discriminated against because of their illegal professions, sex workers continue to be mistreated by social services and health care providers who deny them access to food parcels and medical care.*”

In conclusion: UNDP's support

- Together with UNAIDS who are tracking all kinds of violations visited upon key populations and LGBTI people in Africa, UNDP continues to engage with civil society and LGBTIQ+ organisations in Africa to note, record and provide support wherever possible, to ensure that human rights violations and reduction of access to services needed by LGBTIQ+ and key populations in times of COVID-19 are maintained.
- UNDP is pursuing these interventions through supporting UNDP country offices to repurpose some of their UBRAF/UNAIDS' funding for providing support to LGBTIQ+ people, key populations and prisoners continue to access HIV-related prevention and treatment as well as COVID-19 related precautions in their countries. Similar repurposing Global Funds where UNDP is a principal recipient is also underway. Besides that UNDP has developed general guidance focused on preventing human rights violations and prevention of gender-based violence in times of the COVID-19 epidemic which are widely disseminated to countries to support efforts to prevent stigma, discrimination, human rights violations in times of COVID-19.

End of note

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