



# COVID-19 RESPONSE

April & May Status Report



A family receives a package from the GUIU response team

## Highlights



**Distributed 1,550 relief packages to our girls, youth, and vulnerable community members.**



**Checked in with 2,000+ girls through their parent's mobile phones and at distribution points to provide psychosocial support and encouragement**



**6,000+ people were reached through our Facebook page in the month of May with essential messages concerning COVID-19.**

## Situation Overview

On 22 March 2020, Uganda's health officials confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in Uganda. Despite Uganda's experience fighting the Ebola virus, COVID-19 presents a unique set of challenges - loss of family income, poor health, rising food prices, increased cases of violence in homes - for the communities, and particularly the girls who we serve, who are already struggling with extreme poverty.

On 31 March, the Ugandan government announced a nationwide lockdown including: closing international borders, instituting a dusk-to-dawn curfew, shutting down all but essential businesses, and halting almost all private and public road transportation.

For people living in urban slum areas in Kampala, this presents an extremely difficult reality, as many live day-to-day and in cramped homes without regular access to basic amenities. While the government has provided food to some families, many have missed out. The families that GUIU works with often struggle to get essential supplies in normal times, thus, the extra financial and social impact of COVID-19 is placing many of these families in an impossible situation.

As of 27 May, there have been 281 confirmed cases in Uganda, but thankfully 0 deaths. The lockdown has been extended until the end of May, with communication from the President that restrictions will be eased on 2 June 2020.

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

## Our Response

Girl Up Initiative Uganda (GUIU) remains committed to serving our communities in this critical time. We are using our existing relationships with local authorities, teachers, and parents together with our strategic location within an urban slum community to set up our quick and nimble response with a gender-responsive approach.

Since the outbreak reached Uganda, we have been working with our partners to best support the health, wellbeing, and safety of our girls, youth, and communities during this challenging time. We recognize the importance of a gender-responsive approach to COVID-19 as crises exacerbate existing gender inequalities and have a disproportionate impact on girls and women, particularly amongst the poorest and most socially marginalized groups. This approach means that GUIU's response promotes gender equality and supports the unique needs of women and girls, especially related to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and gender-based violence (GBV).

Given that 82% of Ugandans do not have access to improved sanitation facilities and only 8% of mothers of children under the age of five have access to soap and water (UNICEF, 2019), we chose to provide soap in our distribution packs.

Furthermore, we provided sanitary pads, as at-risk adolescent girls in Kampala are facing increased challenges accessing menstrual products during the pandemic, due to the adverse impact COVID-19 is having on family's income and supply chains around the world. Sanitary pads are more costly and less prioritized by heads of households in the current crisis.



One of GUIU's adolescent girls poses with a pack of sanitary pads

## Emergency Fundraising

We launched a COVID-19 response fund and raised \$31,199 from 48 individual and 3 institutional partners! A generous anonymous donor committed to triple all individual donations on the lead up to Giving Tuesday on 5 May 2020.

## Family Relief Package Distribution



A member of the GUIU response team distributes packages to families

GUIU has distributed relief packages for families of the girls in our programs, patron teachers, Ni-Yetu community structures, and other community members at-risk of hunger. The relief packages included posho, beans, salt, soap, and sanitary pads for the girls.

By providing these packages, these families have been able to stay fed and healthy during this critical time where many cannot even afford a meal. These packages have provided short-term relief to the girls engaged in our programs.

Through our response we supported a total of **1,550 families**. The packages were distributed in collaboration with local authorities and teachers from our partner schools. Watch our video [here](#) to see our distribution in action.

***“It’s been more than rewarding. Doing community work during such a time of vulnerability and need has reconnected me back to the purpose of why I do what I do and that is to serve the most vulnerable.”***

**Monica Nyiraguhabwa, Executive Director**

During the relief package distribution process, many parents shared their experience on how difficult the situation is and conveyed their appreciation for the support given by GUIU:

***“You do not know what you have done for us as a family. The situation is really tough. There is no work anymore and feeding my children is a challenge. This package has come in at a great time. This really means a lot. Thank you so much Girl Up.”***

**AGP Parent**



Girls happily taking their family relief packages home

***“Thank you for remembering us at times such as these. The situation is not good at all. Thank you so much.”***

**AGP Parent**

The distribution of packages has also been a critical way for our team to stay in touch with the girls, who are often hard to access since they do not have mobile phones.

Therefore, our facilitators (Coaches) have been on hand at the distribution points to check-in with the girls to ensure that they are doing ok and to provide advice, support, and encouragement.

## **Responding to the Shadow Pandemic**

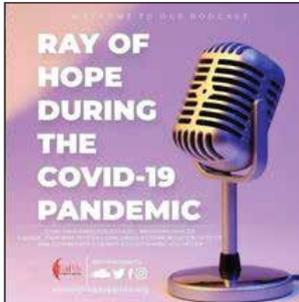
Many girls and women are isolating at home with perpetrators of violence and are unable to access medical treatment, refuge, or help because of the ongoing ban on public and private transport. This has resulted in an exponential increase in cases of GBV, leading to what the UN Women is calling a ‘Shadow Pandemic’ of GBV.

Therefore, GUIU is building on our existing relationships with the local police to respond to the cases of gender-based violence and child neglect, which are on the rise in our communities. Our Program Director and Program Assistant are supporting survivors of violence with psycho-social support and managing our Emergency Fund that provides financial support for girls and women in need of medical or food assistance.



## Youth-Friendly Information Dissemination

Beyond the distribution of our family relief packages, GUIU is also offering ongoing psycho-social support and counselling to different individuals in our communities through regular check-ins via mobile phone. This helps us to know how the different families are coping and we encourage them to stay strong and safe. In addition, in order to communicate with our supporters, beneficiaries and the wider public, we have been consistently active on social media, to continue to spread vital messages at this time.



Our Podcast – “[Ray of Hope During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)”, available on Spotify and Soundcloud, allowed staff members to share what they have been doing differently and how this is helping them keep healthy and active during this lockdown. This was a way for our staff to not only connect with our supporters, but also with one another to boost team morale.

As part of the Ni-Yetu Youth Program, a toll-free number is operating 24 hours a day to report cases of violence, ask any questions about #COVID-19, or just talk. We shared this on all our social media platforms. Our staff are also on-hand to receive calls from girls on the office phone lines.



Our staff held online events and chats with the general public, to answer questions about the situation in Uganda, GUIU’s response and for our staff to directly answer questions and give advice. This included an Instagram Live event with our staff nurse to give advice on health and mental health questions. Also, a Tweet-Chat to discuss the “Impact of COVID-19 on Adolescent Girls”, and a [Facebook Live](#) showcasing our distribution of relief packages.

## External Media



Our Program Director, Clare Tusingwire, spoke to [Girls Globe](#) on the lockdown in Uganda and the effect on girls:

*“I have had the privilege of reaching out to our parents and girls to check on their wellbeing and this has given me an insight into how they are coping during this period. One story that particularly struck me was from a mother I counselled, who shared that she was feeling despondent*

*because she used to be able to work to provide for her children. When she later received one of our relief packages, she was so excited.”*

Clare Tusingwire, Program Director