

**COMMUNITY BASED APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AT
A TIME OF HEIGHTENED RISK**

CSW65 Virtual NGO Forum – March 24th 2021

This event focused on the possibilities and challenges governments around the world face in terms of the approach on domestic violence against women during the Covid pandemic.

The event started with the intervention of Julia Fan, programme coordinator at Women Strong International who welcomed the participants to the event and proceeded to introduce the panellists. The first intervention was in charge of Lori Michau.

Lori Michau – Co Founder and Co director of Raising Voices Uganda

This intervention focused on the effects produced by a gender-blind response in Uganda while tackling the Covid pandemic.

Women bear the burden of the pandemic's consequences in terms of economic and social unrest. Despite being the ones who responded on the front line to the pandemic either in care homes and hospitals, they were also the ones who responded firstly in their own households. These fore mentioned social and economic consequences also had repercussions regarding young girls dropping out of school to be more involved in household chores all over the world.

These repercussions will reflect in the futures of these girls and young women who interrupted their studies to get directly involved in household chores, due to the direct relationship between school desertion and low education levels with lack of opportunities in the future.

Tina Musuya – Centre for Domestic Violence Prevention Uganda

Effects of Uganda-blind Response in Uganda are obvious and have driven a response from civil society and feminist organizations. Most of the initiatives and action plans to put women at the centre of the response were put in place by NGOs and civil society organisations in the country. This evidences the lack of compromise from the Ugandan Government in putting women first in the private and public life matters.

Teresa Shields – Co-founder and co-director of Centro Mujeres Mexico

The response from the Mexican government lacked a gender perspective; the President of the Republic even denied the existence of violence against women during the pandemic. The government created a campaign called "count to ten" in order to tackle domestic violence, this concept, taught to children, in which it is recommended to count to ten in order to lower the levels of aggression is a completely erroneous approach to deal with violence against women. This tactic might work with children, but definitely not with men who are usually repetitive offenders.

Many of the preventive and reactive policies introduced to tackle gender based violence were suffering from resource cuts in order to allocate such resources into plans to deal with the pandemic; the Mexican Government didn't consider these programs a priority in times of confinement, when the experience and the statistics/data show that it was a crucial time to ensure them.

Sopheap Ros – *Gender and Development Cambodia*

The response of the Cambodian Government to Covid-19 was insufficient; women had to bare an extra burden to support the family and the household as well as continuing with their work. This has been exacerbating women's risk of experiencing violence in many settings. It is widely known and accepted that the political sphere in Cambodia is very conservative and driven by a patriarchal system that benefits only men. This was definitely shown in the way the Cambodian government handled the pandemic.

The Centro Mujeres Adaptation to the Pandemic

Now we will explain the way in which *Centro Mujeres México*, led by Teresa Shields adapted to the pandemic, and the actions taken by the organization to reach women in a state of vulnerability in terms of gender based violence as well as social exclusion and lack of support networks:

Centro Mujeres has always been well known for our work within the community, we were informed by women in our community about the many ways in which they were dealing with the pandemic. One of the very first things that we did was to make sure that the government was responding accordingly, this is, with a gender-based approach. What we did was ensuring that we worked jointly with the government to distribute and socialise information to tackle domestic violence. At the same time, we did dissemination of our programs and the attention to women that we provided was broad and clear.

As an institution we adapted our programs, some of them went online, we took a stand to focus on migrant women and women from the most impoverished states in the country: Oaxaca, Veracruz, Chiapas; who come to work in the fields and agriculture. These women who come to work in the fields in Baja California Sur where Centro Mujeres is located, are in isolated areas and don't really know the territory; we as an organisation had to come up with ideas to reach out to these women. We distributed 6,000 hygiene kits which included domestic violence information, we put in motion different ways in which the women could communicate with Centro Mujeres and the authorities in case they needed to, and we set up a 1-800 emergency line as well as a whatsapp number where women could write or call asking for help.