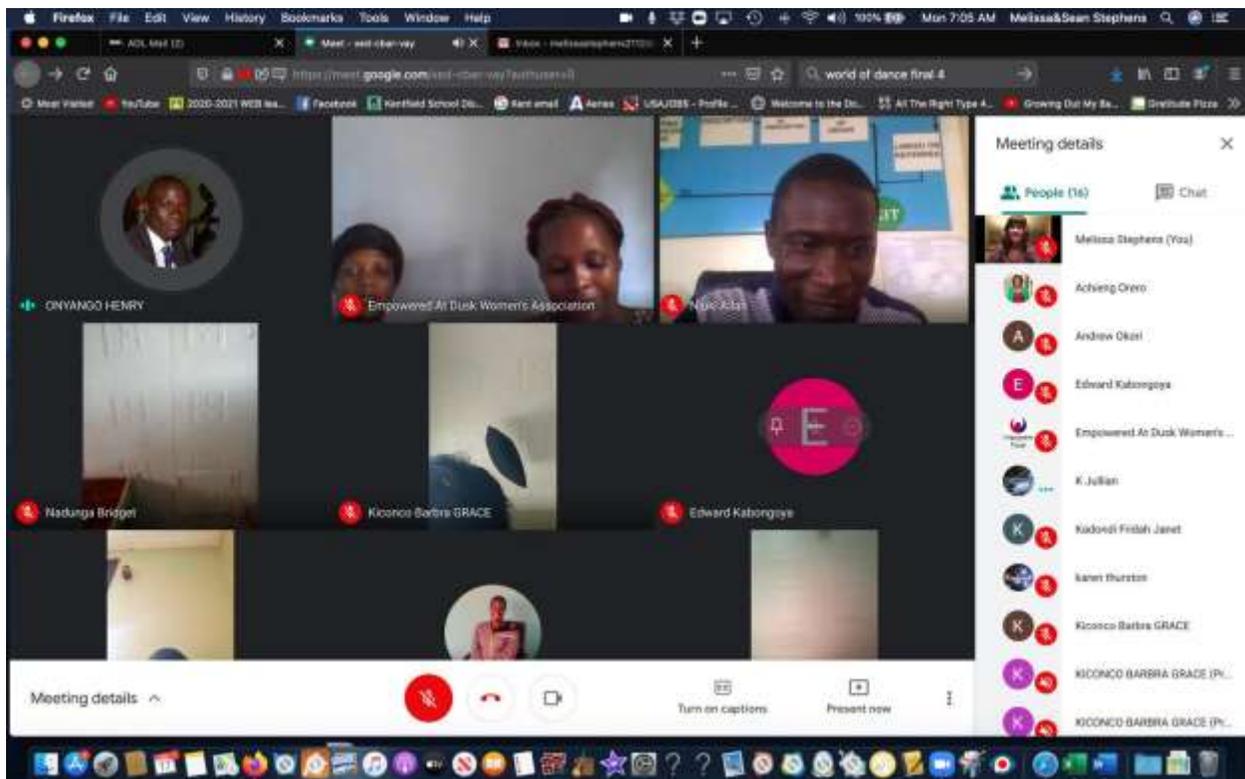




## CHALLENGES OF COVID-19 CRISIS ON SRH AMONG GIRLS AND WOMEN IN UGANDA

### WEBINAR SUMMARY REPORT



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## **Acknowledgements:**

TURGET- Uganda acknowledges participants of the Webinar on Challenges of COVID-19 crisis on SHR among Girls and Women in Uganda. The webinar was held on August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and was organized by TURGET- Uganda with the Inroads facilitation.

The organizers would like to thank Ms. Melisa Stephens, Mrs. Kiconco Grace Barbara Turyagyenda, Ms. Grace Kabayaga and Ms. Bridget Nadunga for their presentations. Ms. Julian Kamwesigye was the moderator and Mr. Edward Kabongoya was the Rappaotuor.

## **Abbreviations Used**

COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
EAST	East African Standard Time
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
USA	United States of America

## 1.0 Introduction

TURGET – Uganda has continued to ensure women and girls in Uganda have access to quality Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services during COVID-19 crisis in 7 districts of Uganda (Kampala, Wakiso, Kayunga, Jinja, Gulu, Mbarara and Masaka). To achieve the above objective TURGET – Uganda has received facilitation from Inroads to enhance communication capacity during COVID- 19 Crisis. Inroads has provided one year internet services: 1 toll free telephone line - 0800100072: 2 mobile telephone handsets: 2 neck less earphones and 2 laptop computers.

A webinar on challenges of COVID-19 crisis on SRH among Girls and Women in Uganda was held on August 17<sup>th</sup> 2020 between 4-6 P.M. East African Standard Time (EAST). The objective of the webinar served both to share SRH challenges faced and to present selected knowledge and lesson products developed during COVID-19 crisis in Uganda. The contents of the webinar were based on abortion cases and experience among Girls and Women in Uganda.

The webinar was attended by 16 participants (2 from USA: 1 from Kenya and 13 from Uganda) including four presenters. Presenters were Ms. Melisa Stephen: Mrs. Kiconco Grace Barbara Turyagyenda: Ms. Grace Kabayaga and Ms. Bridget Nadunga, another presenter by the names of Noella Kabale was unable to attend the webinar. Ms. Julian Kamwesigye was the Moderator and Mr. Edward Kabongoya was the Rapporteur. Appendix 1 provides a list of participants and their countries of origin. The webinar was structured in an introduction of participants; four presentations, each followed by comments, a plenary discussion with the presenters; and a chat-based feedback collection from all participants.

This report presents a summary of the webinar presentations, discussions and feedback from participants and chat information dedicated to specific questions around the Challenges of COVID-19 crisis on SHR among Girls and Women in Uganda. Appendix 2 is the webinar agenda.

## 2.0 Opening Remarks



The webinar started with opening remarks from Ms. Julian Kamwesigye the moderator. Moderator welcomed the participants

to the webinar and reminded them of TURGET- Uganda Vision of “Uganda with a healthy and socio- economically empowered young people and women accessing quality, adequate and equitable sexual and reproductive health services” and Mission of “ To contribute towards raising the level of reproductive health services and standards of living of young people and women in Uganda through increasing access, advocacy, empowerment in partnership with men and working with other development actors”.

Ms. Julian Kamwesigye further informed participants that the webinar was made possible with kind facilitation from Inroads. She informed the audience that Inroads provided funds that have enabled TURGET- Uganda to install a toll free telephone line number 0800100072 to support communication with women and girls in need of safe abortion information and feedback. Funds were also used to acquire internet connection for one year internet services, two mobile telephone handsets, two neck less earphones and two laptop computers. She ended by welcoming participants to the webinar and wished everyone the best of luck.

### **3.0 Presentation**

This section outlines presentation made during the webinar:

#### **3.1 First Session: Challenges of Covid-19 Crisis on Safe Abortion among Girls and Women in Uganda**



This session was presented by Mrs. Kiconco Grace Barbara Turyagyenda- Executive Director TURGET- Uganda.

Mrs. Kiconco introduced the session by informing the audience that in Uganda the first COVID-19 case was reported on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2020. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of April the government ordered restricted movement of the people, a nationwide total lockdown of mass gatherings and introduced an overnight curfew in a bid to curb the spread of the corona virus. The government added the lock down and curfew period will be used to identify, trace and isolate all individuals that have come into contact with confirmed cases. She informed

participants that the number has increased to 1603 infected people 15 deaths and 1,028 recoveries according to the Ministry of Health by mid August 2020.

She mentioned that COVID-19 announced preventive measures and enforced by military and police are disastrous for women and girls. She told the women and girls are locked in houses which has lead to increased unintended and unwanted pregnancies due to quickly diminishing contraceptive supplies and confinement into one place with no source income and quick protection mechanisms.

She further said that women and girls have turned to unsafe means to end these pregnancies, such as use of sharp objects, ingesting herbal concoctions or medications from unknown sources. Mrs. Kiconco stated that abortion is a time-sensitive decision where delays and absence of safe services lead to unsafe abortions in a country where thousands of women already die each year due to restrictive abortion laws and lack of access to safe abortion services. She mentioned that lockdowns and curfews have added to the crisis, preventing women from traveling to clinics for safe abortion methods and blocking service providers from conducting outreach in hard-to-access areas.

She gave a practical experience where women and girls have been calling TURGET- Uganda offices for help with safe abortion services and information. She mentioned that COVID-19 has created delays and disruptions in every step of the supply chain that brings critical safe abortion. Mrs. Kiconco ended the presentation by reminding the audience that COVID-19 is tightening its grip on the country and causing risks of another lockdown and other forceful strategies to achieve adherence to prevention measures.

### **3.2 Second Session: Challenges of Covid-19 Crisis on Safe Abortion among Girls and Women the Global Context**



This session was presented by Madam Melissa Stephens from the United States of America. Madam Melissa Stephens mentioned that Sexual and Reproductive Health Services are important

for women and girls during COVID- 19 global crisis. She mentioned that the impacts of COVID- 19 will be grim among the girls and women. She said that the novel Corona virus will affect the health of millions of women and girls during COVID- 19 global crisis and stated it will have serious social, economic, and Public Policy Implications. She emphasized the need to draw up a roadmap for the recovery of women and girls who have been affected by COVID- 19 global crisis. She said that this must be done together – and begin now.

### **3.2 Third Session: Tackling misinformation among Girls and Women during COVID-19**



This session was presented by Ms. Bridget Nadunga. Ms. Nadunga stated that during this dangerous time of uncertainty, misinformation about the corona virus can cost lives among women and girls. That is why TURGET- Uganda is turning to online platforms and digital media to share correct information and recommendations to dispel common myths. She mentioned that with Inroads support TURGET- Uganda has made this one of its missions.

TURGET- Uganda through digital communication of iPads contributed by Madam Melissa and Mr. Sean of the USA are distributed at community level to fight misinformation and raise awareness on Sexual Reproductive Health well-being and corona virus disease prevention and protection among women and girls. In this work, TURGET – Uganda exposes false facts, disputed and unfounded remedies or cures, doctored images and any other piece of information that could confuse and mislead women and girls. In this work the truth is replacing lies so that women and girls can act in their own best interests of their body choices and rights.

Ms. Nadunga stated that TURGET- Uganda is supporting community-based mechanisms with linkages to functioning clinics for women and girls to seek safe abortion services. Ms. Nadunga mentioned that misinformation about the corona virus has caused fear and anxiety leading to mental illness among women and girls. Ms. Nadunga stated that as the world fights the COVID- 19 pandemic, we know we have another epidemic to overcome – death perpetrated by unsafe abortion against women and girls. She shared her personal experience where the sudden and

complete lockdowns have denied women and girls access to safe abortion services. She mentioned cases where hospital beds are reserved for COVID- 19 cases as isolation centers and treatment points.

She concluded the presentation by stating that women and girls who live without a social safety net. Therefore, there is nothing that shakes their already unstable situation more than COVID-19 crisis. She informed the audience that severe COVID-19 challenges among women and girls are lobbying autonomy of their bodies.

### **3.3 Third Session: Challenges of Safe Abortion Referrals and Linkage during COVID-19 Crisis**



This session was presented by Ms. Grace Kabayaga. Ms. Kabayaga is a community peer educator on women and girls safe abortion services. Ms. Kabayaga informed members of the audience safe abortion referrals and linkages to friendly health care service providers has been affected by COVID-19 crisis leaving many girls and women to die as a result of unsafe abortion methods.

Ms. Kabayaga highlighted transport, communication barriers between health care service providers and those in need of services. She mentioned that suspension of public taxis and boda boda transport providers as the main challenge for referred cases to friendly health care service providers during COVID-19 crisis. She informed the participants about a woman death of a woman in her community as a result of unsafe abortion. Ms. Kabayaga mentioned that the absence of public transport and boda boda transport providers affected their efforts of saving the life of a woman.

The other part of her presentation indicated a series of women and girls sexual assault incidences as a result of lock down, restricted movement, loss of income and absence of community protection mechanisms. Ms. Kabayaga mentioned the number of text messages sent and telephone calls made to her through the Ipad provided by TURGET- Uganda. She mentioned that many girls from ages of 8 years and women of adult age such as 50 years are reporting cases of

sexual assault. Ms. Kabayaga informed the participants of post COVID- 19 challenges such as HIV/AIDS/ STI infections, unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortion as well as death.

She ended her presentation by asking TURGET- Uganda to roll out programs that reach to girls and women holistic sexual assault issues rather than safe abortion only. She told the audience that issues of unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortion are essential but many girls and women are facing challenges of sexual assault trauma, HIV/AIDS/ STI infections and poverty.

### **3.4 Fourth Session: Plenary Discussions and Audience Comments**

During plenary discussion, it was discovered that the demand for safe abortion services are expected to increase as a result of several unintended pregnancies among women and girls. Kare Thurston from USA, was surprised about the absence of safe abortion in Uganda. In her question she asked about availability of contraceptive services, and safe abortion services. In the answer, she was informed that the illegality of abortion is not clear and there is no specific law against abortion. She was further informed about dominant cultural and religious beliefs that cause abortion stigma and trauma among women and girls.

A participant informed the audience that women and girls during lock down lost their source of income and majority are depending on men and boyfriends for a livelihood. She highlighted loss of women and girls body autonomy as the silent outcome of COVID-19 crisis. The participants emphasized the importance for continuous engagement and collaboration at all levels as an essential requirement for the achievement of women healthy lives and well being.

Plenary discussion also outlined COVID-19 challenges that are putting women and girls sexual and reproductive health and rights at greater risk. Participants indentified increased rape and defilement cases among women and girls including early marriages and cohabitation. Participants discussed the importance of networking and collaboration in ending women and girls sexual and delivering safe abortion services during and after COVID-19 crisis.

## **4.0 Webinar Recommendations**

The following are summary of recommendations made during the webinar.

- 4.1 Provision of temporary shelter for women and girls facing serious sexual assault abuses and exploitation. It was agreed that women and girls requires post abortion services such as counseling and welfare.
- 4.2 Provision of accurate safe abortion information to women and girls facing serious sexual assault abuses and exploitation. It was agreed that women and girls requires prevention and protection information to support accurate decision making.

## **5.0 Conclusion and end of the Webinar**

In the collusion the moderator Ms. Julian Kamwesigye thanked participants for sharing their wisdom on challenges of COVID-19 CRISIS on SRH among Girls and Women. She described the webinar as informative and an opportunity for networking and meeting again. She thanked presenters for generosity in sharing their wisdom. The webinar ended at 6:15 P.M. EAST.

## **6.0 Rappaotuur**

Mr. Edward Kabongoya was the Rappaotuur



## Appendix 1

No	Name	Country of Origin
1	Kiconco Grace Barbara Turyagyenda	Uganda
2	Melissa Stephen	United States of America
3	Karen Thurston	United States of America
4	Achieng Orero	Kenya
5	Andrew Okoli	Uganda
6	Kabayaga Grace	Uganda
7	Bridget Nadunga	Uganda
8	Edward Kabongoya	Uganda
9	Shinah Owemugisha	Uganda
10	Allan Njuki	Uganda
11	Henry Onyango Zaboloni	Uganda
12	Justine Nabisubi	Uganda

13	Julian Kamwesigye	Uganda
14	Faridah Nakato	Uganda
15	Deborah Nakatudde	Uganda
16	Oscar Muhwezi	Uganda

## Appendix 2

# CHALLENGES OF COVID-19 ON SRH AMONG WOMEN AND GIRLS IN UGANDA

## WEBINAR

Date: 8/17/2020

Time: 4-6 P.M (EST)

Host: TURGET- Uganda.

### Agenda

No	Item	Time	Responsible Person
1	Call the Webinar to Order	4:00	Moderator – Julian Kamwesigye
2	Self Introduction of Participants	4:00- 4:10	Moderator – Julian Kamwesigye
3	Welcome Remarks	4:10 – 4:15	Moderator – Julian Kamwesigye
4	Session 1	4:15- 4:30	Mrs. Kiconco Grace Barbara Turyagyenda- Special Speaker
5	Discussion	4: 30- 4:45	All Participants
6	Session 11	4:45 – 5:00	Melisa Stephns
7	Discussion	5: 00- 5:15	All Participants
8	Session 111	5:15 – 5:45	Bridget Nadunga, Grace Kabayaga, Noella Kabale.
9	Discussion	5:45- 5:55	All Participants
10	Word of Thanks & Close down	5:55- 6:00	Moderator – Julian Kamwesigye